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# AUDREY.

A Novel

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"THE TIDE OF LIFE," "THE CUP AND THE LIP," "THE  
FOREST AND THE FORTRESS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.


VOL. I.

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# AUDREY.

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## CHAPTER I.

CHARLIEWOOD was one of the most secluded and picturesque villages in England, some thirty years ago; now, a railroad running through it, and the proximity of a rising town, have taken somewhat from the charm of its once hidden beauty and rural repose; but enough still remains of wooded dells, and winding, embowered lanes, to show what it must have been, and to preserve, in a degree, its reputation as a spot remarkable for the rustic and "cosy" beauty peculiar to English scenery.

The church, then as now, was its great boast

and pride, and with justice, for in antique beauty and simple majesty it had few equals. It was surrounded by a large church-yard, overshadowed by old oaks and elms ; an avenue of sombre and ancient yew-trees led to the western entrance of the building.

Opposite the gate by which the avenue was entered stood a small, low cottage, almost buried beneath a heavy thatched roof, and an abundance of creepers which ran all over it, looking such a perfect nest of comfort and clustering flowers, that few strangers ever passed the spot without pausing at the wicket to gaze on the dwelling, which had rather the look of a gigantic beehive—the progenitor of the smaller ones standing beneath the eaves—than of a human abode. Here dwelt, in much comfort and peace, the village clerk and sexton, Jonathan Dabney, a man looked-up to by the villagers as a prodigy of learning (for they seldom understood more than half he said), as well as a pattern of solemn morality and parochial dignity ; in which opinion

of his own merits Jonathan perfectly coincided. He was a tall portly man, and had a sonorous voice and a good ear for music, of which he was exceedingly proud. In fact, pride was at once the besetting sin of Dabney's nature, and the origin of most of his good acts. He had gained a certain reputation amongst the members of his little world, and he tried to live up to it. "It would not become him," was the code of his morality, and it was this fear of censure or love of approbation that kept him from the ale-house, made him strict in the fulfilment of his duty as parish clerk, charitable as far as his means allowed him to give, and even influenced his efforts to make his house and garden the model ones of the village. His life was a constant acting of the old Roman's demand, "Give me your applause;" and his simple neighbours answered the appeal by showering on him "golden opinions" of all kinds, and admiring him "to the top of his bent." But they scarcely loved him withal—if he had their admiration, his



brother, a certain unlucky, imprudent, vagabond sort of fellow, who, after a roving and idle youth, had returned to dwell near his family, obtained their affection. "Poor Tom," as he was always called, had "the one thing" that Jonathan Dabney lacked; he possessed *a heart*—a warm, unselfish, kindly nature that sympathised with all around him—and a frank, joyous spirit that took no thought for the future, but brightened the present like a sunbeam. He was undergardener at the "Squire's," and inhabited a small lodge in the park; a situation which his brother's influence had procured him, and which he retained in spite of many imprudences and short comings, by favour of the Squire's lady, who appreciated the taste and skill which he displayed in the arrangement of her flower-beds, and was ever his intercessor and champion.

Tom had been, as we have said, a rover, and in the course of a wandering life—during which it was whispered that he had been a soldier, sailor, and even, at last, an actor amongst stroll-

ing players—he had acquired habits that greatly scandalised his respectable brother. He was too fond of the ale-house, where he was wont every evening to keep the rustic guests in roars of laughter by his songs, tales, or clever mimicry; the latter talent being exercised with what Jonathan considered most scandalous disrespect of persons. When he heard that Tom could “take off” the Squire to the life, and even mimicked the Rector, he stood aghast with horror; and when his informant kindly volunteered the further information that his brother would at times harangue his listeners in Jonathan’s own style, using the very same hard words and tone of voice and manner, then the sexton came to the conclusion that Tom was an utter reprobate, and at once cast him forth from his affections, prohibited him from coming to his house, and forbade his wife to name their unworthy kinsman in his presence.

This last injunction was very unwillingly obeyed, for the kind-hearted, merry little woman on whom it was laid, had a certain weak liking

for the ill-conditioned scapegrace, and a very strong sisterly affection for his pretty gentle wife, who was her especial intimate and gossip. She understood her husband's character too well, however, to dispute it; and only indemnified herself for the privation of public intercourse with her sister-in-law by an occasional stolen interview with her, and the secret conveyance of little household comforts to the lodge.

When, however, a daughter was born to Tom's wife, Kate Dabney ventured to break the silence imposed on her. She thought it a fit opportunity to try her little skill at reconciling the brothers, and she watched for a favourable moment to make the attempt. It came at last, on an evening when Jonathan took his seat in the chimney corner, and began discussing his pipe with an air of solemn and important enjoyment.

The scene was a perfect picture of domestic comfort, for Kate had woman's wit enough to know the soothing and propitiating effect of sacri-

ficing to the household deities; and a clean, well-swept hearth, a blazing fire, a branch of bright holly-berries over the mantle-piece, a foaming tankard of home-brewed ale, and the freshest of loaves and butter on the white tablecloth, pleased the eyes of her majestic husband, whose glance wandered round the neat room till they finally settled with a very self-satisfied contented expression on Kate, who was decidedly its greatest ornament. By that law of contrast which generally prevails in love matters, the tall burley sexton had chosen the wee-est of wee wives. Mrs. Dabney was scarcely more than four feet ten in height, but as well proportioned as a perfect statue. She had the smallest and most delicately shaped hands and feet, tiny features, bright black eyes, a glowing complexion, and a smile expressive of as kind a heart as ever beat in woman's bosom. Kate was perfectly aware of these personal advantages, and made the most of them, by attiring her small person neatly and skilfully in bright colours, and quaint little rustic

fashions peculiar to herself. She was naturally inclined to coquetry, but exercised her gift at winning and teasing only at Jonathan's expense, who—great man as he thought himself—was very much under the dominion of his wee wife.

She was well skilled in reading his countenance, and she now interpreted its expression as sufficiently favourable to justify her in a slight disobedience to his commands; therefore, gazing earnestly down on her knitting she began:

“ Dame Oliver was here this morning, John; and she says that Mary's baby is the sweetest little thing she ever nursed.”

“ Kate!” exclaimed the sexton in a tone of indignant astonishment, “ have you forgotten that I told you never to name—”

“ Tom, to you,” she interrupted him quickly, “ but Mary is not Tom; *she* never offended you, and poor baby is quite innocent of her father's faults. We should not punish the innocent with the guilty, Jonathan; you teach us *that* from the reading desk you know.”



offended me, I forget all about the quarrel directly, and am so happy to make it up that I really seem to like them better than ever."

"All very well for you, Kitty; but a man has his dignity to consider, and connected as I am with the church, being clerk of this parish, I can't allow myself—"

Once more the eager little woman interrupted him; she saw his thoughts were taking an unfavourable direction.

"As belonging to the church," she said, "you can and ought to set a good example. Let people see what a kind brother you are, John, and shake hands with Tom."

She was gaining her point rapidly.

"If Tom would beg pardon," he said hesitatingly.

"Beg pardon! to be sure he will, and gladly, too, I know. Let me run across to the lodge and bring him to you at once."

She sprang to her feet. Jonathan would have made some faint resistance to this hurried con-

clusion ; but her eagerness overbore every objection, and in a few moments she was on the road to the lodge, which was at no great distance from the cottage ; her heart beating joyfully, and her little hand clasping a small packet for the use of her dear sister-in-law.

She found the young mother seated beside the fire, in an old arm-chair, with her infant on her lap, Dame Oliver, the ancient village nurse, opposite to her ; Tom's favourite dog was upon the hearth, but his own place vacant. The greeting between the women was warmly affectionate, and Mary Dabney, when she learnt that Kate's visit was not a stolen one, and that their former sisterly intercourse was to be renewed, shed tears of joy and gratitude.

“ For I have so missed you, Kitty,” she said tenderly. “ Dame Oliver has been very good to me, and dear Tom is always kind ; but there is such a comfort in a sister you know ; and besides, I have been vexing that he should have seemed ungrateful to his brother for getting him

These last words were a very skilful stroke. She knew well—the little mischievous woman—that the clerk delighted in being thought a kind of public teacher himself: Jonathan put his pipe to his lips again, smoked a couple of seconds, and then replied solemnly:

“You are right in the main, Kitty; and I am glad you pay attention to the Sunday teaching; but, as I have told you before, you are not to expect to understand every thing you hear. We must, as his reverence says, take the help of competitors.”

Kate moved her little foot impatiently.

“Competitors or no competitors,” she said, “I am sure that what’s right is plain enough. You should not punish poor Mary for Tom’s fault, nor me neither.”

“And I don’t do so, Kitty. How have I ever vexed or punished you or her?”

“How? There’s a question, after keeping us apart from one another all this time; never letting her come to me, nor me to her. If that

is not punishing two poor women that love one another, what is?"

"I have been and am sorry for it, Kitty; but as Tom and I don't speak, of course his wife can't come here, nor you go to her."

"But why not speak to poor Tom, Jonathan? You should remember he is not so clever as you are, and don't so well know what is right, and so pity his folly and forgive him. Do, now, husband dear, for my sake."

And Kate came and knelt down beside the sexton, and looked imploringly in his face.

"Do," she continued, "do, dear John, forgive him. Remember how you always say, forgive *us* as we forgive others. You should act up to what you teach."

"I do forgive him," said the sexton gravely, "I always have forgiven him; but I can't forget his behaviour, and I don't want to see him any more."

"Now that's not *my* way of forgiving," said Kate warmly, "when I forgive people who have

were soon engrossed in an animated gossip touching names, babies and christenings, which ended only as the church clock struck nine. Kate started up at the sound.

“I must go home,” she said. “I cannot wait any longer for Tom, or Jonathan will think I am lost. Tell him to come up early to-morrow morning, Mary, and make it up with his brother. I am sorry he was out to-night.”

“And so am I,” said Mary, with a sigh; “but won’t you be afraid to go back by yourself, the road being so lonesome? Shall nurse step over with you?”

“Oh, no! I am not afraid, and it is but a step. Good night, sweetheart,” kissing her sister, “and good night to my niece Audrey.”

And laughing merrily Kate Dabney stepped across the threshold of the lodge. It was, as we have said, but a short distance from the sexton’s cottage; but the road ran between the churchyard on one side, and the wood belonging to the manor on the other, and was very much darkened



and overshadowed by trees ; but she was a bold-hearted little woman, and walked fearlessly forward, glancing up at the bright, frosty, star-lit sky, and even pausing now and then to admire the lustre of some bright planet or to marvel that men should be able to call all those shining myriads by their names. During one of these pauses she was rather startled by hearing the distant report of a gun down in the wood. What could it be? She listened, but no cry for help or other sound followed it, and, with a passing thought that there must be poachers in the preserves, Kate quickened her pace, and was soon beneath the shelter of her own roof-tree. She found her husband a little vexed at her long absence, and much disposed to retract his promise of reconciliation with Tom, whom he blamed greatly for leaving his wife and child so continually for the ale-house, and in this last condemnation Kate could scarcely refrain from joining ; but for Mary's sake she feigned belief in his being at the Hall, or detained abroad by some

his place, though I am sure poor Tom meant no harm, and has been sorry ever since."

"Well, he has only to say he is sorry now, and it will be all right again. Where is he, Mary?"

The wife blushed a little as she replied that she did not know, that she fancied he had gone to the Hall perhaps, and Kate interpreting her embarrassment and feeling for it, came inwardly to the conclusion that Tom *was* a very idle fellow, and that she would tell him so herself pretty sharply when they met; meantime she tried to divert her friend's thoughts from his inopportune absence by admiring and praising the baby, which had been transferred to her own lap.

"'Tis the sweetest little creature, Mary; the prettiest tiny thing I ever saw," she exclaimed; "remember I am to be godmother, and I dare say Jonathan will be godfather to it; and, listen gossip, we will call her Catherine, and you will love your little Kitty (for my sake) all the better for her name."

“ Indeed, and it is what I have always wished,” said Mary; “ but Tom has got such a fancy in his head about her. He says she is a country wench, and so shall be called *Audrey*.”

Kate lifted up her little hands in astonishment.

“ Heard one ever the like,” she said laughing, “ why where did he ever get such a heathenish, boyish name from?”

“ It is a woman’s name, and not heathenish, for it’s in a printed book, Kate; the great book yonder, that Tom is so fond of reading,” replied Mary; “ and he is quite bent upon it. I never saw him so determined before.”

“ Well, I shall try and persuade him to give up his whim,” said Kate, nodding her head resolutely; “ my godchild shall go by no such name, I can tell him. Why, I shouldn’t think the parson would christen her by it, and I am sure Jonathan won’t approve *at all*.”

Dame Oliver now chimed in her own dissatisfaction at such a misnomer, and the three women

errand of the Squire's and soothing the elder brother to the best of her power, waited impatiently for the morrow, which was to set all things right.

Alas! when did such a morrow ever come? At early dawn they were awakened by nurse Oliver knocking at the door and calling them up, to communicate the alarming fact that Tom Dabney had not returned all night, and that her charge, poor Mary, was half out of her mind with fear and sorrow. The report of the gun which she had heard down in the wood at once recurred to Kate's mind, and in hurried accents and with a blanched cheek she told it to her husband. He looked seriously alarmed.

"You ought to have let me know it the moment you came in, Kate," he said, "that I and our neighbours might have gone to find out its cause; if it were only poachers, it would have been well to take them."

Alas! that was the very reason which had caused her silence. Naughty little woman, she

had a strong sympathy with the breakers of the game laws, and would rather have sheltered than betrayed them. But now her conscience smote her bitterly for the concealment, and she joined her husband in reproaching herself. Jonathan made haste to dress and proceed in search of his lost brother, whilst Kate hurried to the lodge to nurse and soothe and comfort poor Mary.

The search proved utterly vain. No trace of poor Tom from the moment he left the village ale-house, the previous night, could be obtained. He had been—it was there testified—very merry, very amusing, and withal unusually abstemious; leaving his boon-companions earlier than was his custom, on the plea of his wife's illness. The wood from whence Kate had heard the report of the gun was searched carefully; there were no traces such as poachers might leave in the covert, and no sign of any deed of violence having defiled its rural loveliness.

Tom Dabney's appeared to be one of those mysterious disappearances we have on record,



which have never been explained, and for which no probable surmise can account. He was seen no more in Charliewood, and whether he were the victim of the shot which Kate Dabney had heard, or whether he had taken flight on some wild and vagabond fancy, remained an uncertainty; the more ill-natured of the village gossips surmised the latter; but the majority, amongst whom poor Tom, with all his faults, had been a great favourite, firmly believed that he had been killed and his body carried away by poachers, on whom he had come suddenly, and whom he had probably threatened or defied with his usual rash and thoughtless impetuosity.

His death or disappearance proved, however, fatal to his unhappy wife. She was seized with a brain fever, and died in less than a week after the sad and mysterious event. Kate Dabney never left her sister-in-law's bedside during those days of suffering and horror; she watched tenderly over her, and finally closed her eyes, and when all was over she took the infant to her

bosom and mentally resolved to do her best to replace the mother it had lost. Two days after the funeral she carried it and its nurse home to the sexton's cottage. Jonathan made no objection to the charge thus imposed on him; he had felt, much more bitterly than he chose to avow, the death of his brother whilst still unreconciled to him, and he received the infant from his wife's arms, and bent over it and kissed it with more of genuine and unrestrained feeling than she had ever known him manifest, and as he returned it to her she held up her own face, bathed in tears, for a kiss.

“Dear Jonathan!” she sobbed, “dear Jonathan, I knew you would love and pity the poor little desolate baby, and not cast it upon the parish; I knew you would—but I thank and bless you for it a thousand, thousand times; the more so, because I can't get over the thoughts that, perhaps, if I had told you of the shot I heard, it might not have been an orphan.”

“Nonsense, Kitty, no such thing,” said the

sexton kindly ; “ if you *had* told me, it would have been too late to do any good ; it would have been all over with poor Tom before we could have reached the place. Don’t fret yourself about that, little woman.”

But the little woman did fret about it notwithstanding ; and never, in fact, could completely divest herself of a feeling of remorse with regard to that unfortunate concealment. Looking on herself as having injured Tom by it, she was the more scrupulously desirous to fulfil whatever she knew to be his wishes, and therefore when her husband proposed having the baby christened by her own name or its mother’s, she insisted on that of “ Audrey ” being given it instead of Kate or Mary. Jonathan Dabney did not care to contradict her in the matter, though such an innovation on the orthodox nomenclature of his register would at any other time have received the most strenuous opposition from him ; he merely took the precaution of privately informing the worthy Rector of his wife’s wish to fulfil

poor Tom's intentions in the matter, and was gratified by learning from his reverend pastor that the name was that of a Christian woman (an abbreviation for the old saxon one of Ethelreda), and that Tom had found it in a book which the Rector also read and loved. Moreover, the clergyman's wife offered to stand sponsor, in conjunction with Kate and Jonathan, and thus the scruples of the parish clerk were entirely set at rest.

On Christmas-day the infant was brought into the flower-decked church, and there received the name of Audrey, in the presence of a crowd of villagers, whose deepest sympathy had been excited by the sorrows which had attended the dawning of her life, and who, amidst suppressed sobs and exclamations of pity and wonder, pronounced the babe as fair and delicate a thing as the snow-berries that adorned the font.

There was no rejoicing in the sexton's dwelling after the christening; death had been too

recently in their family ; but Jonathan held the baby on his knee in thoughtful silence for more than half an hour after their return home, and when he gave it back into his wife's arms, presented her with a golden guinea, to be laid by as his christening gift to the little Audrey.

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## CHAPTER II.

THE child grew and throve like the flowers surrounding the sexton's cottage, and became quite a little idol to Kate, who delighted in dressing, nursing and petting her. She was a great favourite also of Jonathan's; he felt for her the kindness which we all entertain for those whom we have benefited, and his love of applause was gratified by the praise which the neighbours bestowed on his conduct towards his brother's orphan. He was charmed when the baby extended her little arms to him, to be taken and danced; reported to all his acquaintance, with rather tedious prolixity, her broken words when



she began to speak, and, as soon as she could toddle by his side, led her everywhere with him. Thus, whilst Kate was busied with her household cares, the little Audrey played in the churchyard, as near as might be to the spot where Jonathan worked, either at his task of grave digging, or keeping the cemetery in the neat order exacted by the Rector—and often, the good man would pause in his toil, and leaning on his spade gaze with the fondness and pride of a parent on his infant companion, who, seated on a grassy mound, filling her small hands with the daisies that grew on it, and laughing in innocent glee, at every butterfly that passed, or scarlet ladybird that sometimes ventured on her dress or arm, formed quite a pretty object in the rural landscape. An image of dawning life amidst death ; of unmixed and thoughtless mirth amidst the sadness of mortality. Sometimes she followed her uncle into the church, and on such occasions manifested a reverential awe which Jonathan thought remarkable, and quite befitting *his* niece.

“ You’d wonder at her, Kitty,” he said, after one of these visits, “ she never runs about or laughs or rattles in her merry shrill way, that one can hear across the churchyard, but stands still and looks about her in a solemn quiet sort of way, or creeps softly up the aisles and whispers to me under her breath. It is surprising in such a child.”

“ She is quick at catching people’s ways, John,” replied Kitty, “ and she sees *you* look and move quietly in the church ; besides it has a solemn look the beautiful large place, and the light comes soft and hushed-like through the painted windows. It is that daunts her, for she is too little to know what a holy place she is in.”

Kate was right ; though it would be difficult to determine how *soon* a sense of the sanctity of the place was impressed on the infant’s mind. It is certain that the impressions of those first years were amongst the strongest and most vivid of her life ; long, long afterwards Audrey would recall as the faint remembrance of an old dream,

that quaint churchyard with its mossy grave-stones and whispering trees ; and see in fancy the flickering light and shadow on the grassy mounds ; and the grey church-tower and the clock, which she had so often watched, with wonder at what its ever moving hands could be.

The stillness, the repose, the beauty of the spot acted on the child's mind, which was naturally of no common order, and awoke thought earlier than usual. She grew a grave serious little girl with more of Jonathan's solemn manner than quite pleased her merry bustling aunt ; who, at times, fretted herself with fears that Audrey was too wise to live.

“She is so pale,” Kate would say to her gossips, “and she has such dark lines round her eyes, that I am sure she can't be well though she never complains, and eats, drinks and sleeps well—I wish she would laugh and play like other children. I would forgive her a little mischief every now and then, but, la, you ! she has no notion of it ; her great delight is to look at the

pictures in Jonathan's large Bible, and to hear sad old tunes sung to her. She won't look up at a merry one, but if I begin singing a doleful ditty over my work she will bring her little stool to my feet and sit looking up in my face with such a strange look in her eyes that it half frightens me."

"Perhaps she ain't quite right in the head," suggested the neighbour who received these confidential disclosures,

"Not right? La! she is only *too* clever—You should hear the questions she asks Jonathan sometimes! Why, (only don't say so for the world!) she quite puzzles him, they are so queer; and yet he knows a'most everything too."

"He's mighty fond of her however, Mrs. Dabney; one never sees the sexton without the child."

"Indeed and so he is, Mrs. Ford, and she of him. It is strange enough, but she might pass for his child better than for poor Tom's, she has so many of his ways. She is not at all like her giddy, rollicking, poor, kind father."

“ May be she takes more after her mother ; Mary was a very quiet meek-spirited soul, without a word to throw at a dog.”

“ Nay I’ll assure you she does not ; she can put herself in a passion when she’s crossed as well as another ; and *at times*, not often I allow, she will talk by the hour.”

The neighbour shook her head ; Audrey seemed a positive puzzle.

“ You’ll have a good job with her, by and by I expect,” she said “ I dont like those odd children.”

Kate rather startled at having given this unfavourable impression, forthwith launched into praises of her adopted child. “ Audrey was the kindest-hearted, most loving little soul ” she said, “ not sullen at all, only old-fashioned rather ; and what else could be expected from a poor infant shut up with two grown folks and never having a play-fellow of her own age ? Mrs. M’Coy the Rector’s wife—sweet kind lady that she was—thought it very bad for Audrey, and

talked of sending her to the village school, as well as to the Sunday one."

This resolution of her lady godmother was shortly afterwards carried out. Audrey went to the dame's school in the village; a very different temple of knowledge from the national schools of these days. It was kept by an aged woman who might have sat for the portrait of Shenstone's schoolmistress; a neat, trim, kindly soul, who was a profound adept in knitting, netting, and sewing; could read a chapter in the Bible very fairly, nay, it was whispered amongst her scholars, had actually been heard to utter all the hard names in the genealogy given by St. Matthew without once stopping; knew every syllable of the catechism and most of Doctor Watt's hymns. Audrey impressed with great awe for this accomplished woman—we may observe that either naturally or from association, reverential feeling belonged to her character—entered her little parlour on the first morning of their acquaintance, timidly and with downcast eyes; a certain re-



commendation to her mistress's favour, for the dame esteemed modesty and shamefacedness as better qualities than even shrewdness and talent, (especially in pupils of her own sex) and was ever inclined to encourage and re-assure them. So calling the little girl to her side, she patted her soft brown hair, spoke kindly to her, and examined with spectacled eyes the contents of the green bag hanging on her arm, commending the nice new Dyché's Spelling Book, and bidding her be a good child and do the work Kate had sent neatly.

In silent compliance with this command Audrey took her seat on a form near the dame ; but it was no easy matter, in that new scene to fix her attention on her task. Her eyes wandered round the room, attracted by the pictures on the wall, two of which she thought wonderfully beautiful ; they were brilliant coloured scenes from the "Nut-brown Maid," and so was the sampler wrought by Dame Page's own hands that hung over the chimney piece, and on which was worked

in the gayest cottons a parrot eating cherries of unusual size and colour.

The door, too, stood open, for it was a hot summer's day, and through it might be seen a very pretty garden full of flowers; whilst from the branch of a large walnut tree that overshadowed the porch, hung a cage with a golden bird in it, as Audrey believed; for she had never before seen a canary. No marvel that she could not learn her spelling and that her hemming was so slow in progressing; she was weaving quite a tale of wonder about that golden bird and the pretty pictures, and started as from a dream when summoned to her dame's side to repeat her task.

Alas! it was not known; and though Mistress Page made all due excuses and did not punish her on this first day of her probation, she remained thenceforward impressed with the idea that Audrey was a dull child from whom little could be expected. This reputation for stupidity obtained also amongst her schoolfellows, with

symptom of weariness to turn his attention and thoughts in another direction. But for the accidental misfortune which had darkened his life Johnnie would have been an unusually gifted child. His face was exceeding beautiful, not only in expression, but in form and feature. His thick clustering brown curls hid a high, fair, delicate forehead, marked with pencilled brows which overshadowed the very softest of blue eyes, full of tenderness and mirth. His nose and mouth were delicately formed; his complexion clear and pure as a young girl's. He was patient, gay, full of humour, and very fond of study in which he made great progress—so great indeed that the Curate had become interested in his endeavours to obtain knowledge and occasionally looked in on the dame, and gave Johnnie a lesson in reading, arithmetic or geography.

An intimacy sprang up between this little fellow and Audrey, in consequence of the pity, which her frequent punishments for not kowing her lessons, excited in him. On one very fine

sunshiny summer day—a Saturday half-holiday—the unlucky girl had been “kept in,” as a due chastisement for her mutilation of certain hard syllables, which she had been unable to spell, and sat in the deserted school-room alone (save Johnnie’s presence), pouring over the bewildering, uninteresting task over which her pearly tears fell fast. It was a heavy privation for Audrey to be shut up whilst the sun was darting such joyous rays in at the open door, reminding her of the dancing lights and flickering shadows in her favourite retreat, the church-yard; and she did not bear it with her usual quiet submission. Johnnie lay watching her for some time in silence. At length—the tears still resting on her glowing cheek, red with excitement and shame—she raised her head with a sigh, and fixing her eyes on the waving boughs of the walnut-tree, appeared utterly forgetful of the open book upon her knee.

“Audrey!” said little Johnnie, softly. She started and turned towards him.

whom she did not become popular, as she found no pleasure in their merry sports, and shrank from their rustic rudeness. Two only amongst them appreciated Audrey, and these were a little crippled boy, and a girl about her own age.

Phœbe Ford was a very pretty little girl, the daughter of Kate's neighbour and gossip; she had known and played with Audrey before she became her schoolfellow, and clung timidly to her, with an instinctive and unconscious sense of inferiority. But the boy had the strongest hold on the affection of Audrey herself. He was the grandson of the dame, and having been frightfully crippled by a fall in infancy, and thus rendered wholly incapable of working for his bread, or even sitting up, she had taken him from his father (a widower) who dwelt in a distant parish, and was overburdened with children, and supported and brought him up herself.

Her care and toil for him were rewarded by a passionate attachment on the boy's part, and by the development of so much moral beauty,

and such holy graces of character, that she felt rather pride than shame for the feeble object of her watchfulness and, originally, of her regret.

It was a touching sight, to behold the old dame after the day's labours were ended, sitting beside the rude couch on which Johnnie Page reclined, trying her utmost skill and simple wit to amuse and please her suffering charge. In summer time the hard old sofa was moved beneath the porch, from whence he could see the gay, trim flower garden, and beyond it the village green where his school-mates played, jumped, and shouted in the glee of lusty boyhood. At first the dame had feared that the sight of their games might pain him by awaking regret that he could not join in them, but when she found that Johnnie enjoyed the contemplation of their fun, that he laughed merrily at any boyish tricks, and appeared to share fully even as a mere spectator in their amusement, she always placed him where he could witness the sports in which he might not join, seating herself however by his side, to watch that he did not grow sad or weary, and ready at the slightest



pleased her godmother, Mrs. M'Coy, by a sudden and wonderful improvement in saying her Catechism on Sundays.

Audrey was very grateful for all Johnnie's kindness, and endeavoured to manifest her sense of it, by a thousand little acts of attention. He loved flowers, and when Audrey could not coax Jonathan to bestow a nosegay on her (for no hand save his own privileged one might gather the sexton's lilies and roses), the hedges were searched and made tributary to this taste of the boy's, and she had many a struggle with sharp-tempered briars, and dared the perils of many a great ditch, whose depths were frightful to her childish imagination, in order to win sweet dog roses and sweeter honeysuckles for Johnnie. She saved her cakes and sweetmeats for him; hoarded her few pence to buy him fruit; was never weary of pleasing him. Sometimes on grand occasions, as on a birthday or at Christmas and Easter, Dame Page would be invited to tea at the sexton's, and Johnnie would

be drawn thither in his garden-chair also, and installed as Audrey's guest in her cheerful home ; and Kate would laugh till her eyes filled with tears, at the devoted attention of the little girl to her playfellow. Indeed to watch how she would place him in the snugest corner by the fire, and how her eyes would glisten with pleasure because Johnnie enjoyed the hot cakes and tea, was an amusement even to the stately Jonathan.

But one day, about two years from the commencement of their intimacy, Audrey found that she possessed something which Johnnie prized above sweetmeats, cakes, or flowers—this was her father's volume of "Shakspeare." The boy was a complete bookworm, had read and re-read every book that came within his reach, and had exhausted the little collection which formed the library of the villagers. A strange jumble of reading it had been ; for his voracious appetite devoured indiscriminately every volume that reached his hand, from the "Gardener's Oracle" or "Cookery Book," to "Hume's History of Eng-

“Audrey,” he said, “why do you never know your task?”

“Because I can’t learn,” she replied sorrowfully, “It is so very hard—I can’t remember it. I am stupid, you know; all the girls say I am.”

“You don’t look stupid to me, not like Ann Gibbs,” said Johnnie; “I don’t believe you are stupid, Audrey. I think I know why you can’t remember your spelling. You are always looking at and thinking of other things. I dare say, if I were to tell you a story, you could recollect it?”

“Oh, yes, Johnnie,” brightening up, “I could indeed.”

“Well, bring your book here, and let me see if I can teach you your lesson.”

She obeyed gladly, and her young teacher, by dint of making her repeat it after him, and a hundred times recalling her wandering attention, succeeded in his attempt. Audrey repeated it perfectly.

“Well done,” said Johnnie, “now I will tell you a story.”

And he recited to his delighted and grateful little auditor the pretty fairy tale of “Diamonds and Pearls.” Audrey was enchanted. Highly imaginative, her fancy coloured the whole story ; she could see the very old woman, the well, the perverse girl and the good one, and she entered into such an animated discussion of the incidents, with such good faith in their truth, that Johnnie was greatly amused, though he scarcely knew why, and told his grandam when Audrey had said her lesson and been dismissed, that he should like that little girl to come and play with him sometimes. Poor Dame Page was rejoiced that he had a wish she could so easily gratify, and nearly every day afterwards Audrey spent an hour or more with Johnnie. He taught her all her tasks, and as she had never been deficient in dexterity with her needle she was seldom punished now, and grew daily in the dame’s favour, though not higher in her estimation with regard to talent. However, she soon learned to read under the boy’s diligent superintendence, and

land” and “Paley’s Evidences!” “Sir Charles Grandison,” “Gulliver’s Travels,” and “Mother Goose’s Fairy Tales” were, however, all the fiction that had ever hitherto fallen in his way, and when Audrey—in compliance with his often repeated wish that “he had something new to read,”—entered the school-room with the heavy volume, which was her sole inheritance, clasped in her arms, he gave a shout of joy, and almost forgot in his eagerness to inspect its contents the thanks due to its good-natured little bearer. But Audrey did not want him to thank her; she was amply repaid for carrying the large book, by his expressions of delight and wonder. There were pictures in it—not beautiful and fanciful illustrations, but likenesses of once popular actors and actresses, in their respective favourite characters. Miss Farren, in Olivia—Mrs. Siddons, in Isabella and Constance—Mrs. Abingdon, in Rosalind; and as Johnnie turned over “As you Like It,” he caught sight of the name “Audrey,” and forthwith both children eagerly began the perusal

of that most exquisite Arcadian romance, to which the girl (although she knew it not, for her parents were never spoken of to her) owed her own fantastic appellation. How it delighted them ! How they pitied Orlando for having such a cruel brother ; and loved old Adam and the kind Celia, and laughed at Touchstone's wit. Those two village children, accustomed to hear an older, quainter English than those of a higher class ever listen to, more readily understood his jokes, perhaps, than if they had been better taught and gently reared. They could never find time enough for the perusal of this magic volume, which opened to them a new existence. We do not mean to say they understood what they read completely ; very far from it, but there are in " Shakspeare "—as Johnson said of a far higher and holier book—" shallows for a child to sport, and depths for an elephant to swim in," and they found scenes of delight in Prospero's magic island, in Ardennes Forest, in the imaginary Bohemia of the " Winter's Tale," and even on



the "blasted heath," near Forres, that made the world present a very different vision to their fancy than it had hitherto. The child whose mind had been absorbed in a dreamy contemplation and enjoyment of nature, awoke to a sense of active life and a new train of thought, and from the day she first read Shakspeare beside the cripple Johnnie, might be dated the mental development of our little Audrey.

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## CHAPTER III.

THE Rector of Charliewood was greatly and deservedly beloved by his people. He was all that a parish priest should be; a teacher—guide—friend—father to his flock. He mixed familiarly amongst them, took a kindly interest in their temporal as well as in their eternal welfare, gave them good counsel with regard to their worldly difficulties, and ghostly comfort under their afflictions. There was scarcely an eye in the parish that did not brighten when it beheld the cheerful pleasant face, and very clerical-looking figure of Mr. M'Coy approaching; nor an ear that did not welcome the sound of his clear mu-

sical voice. His popularity amongst the village children was quite unbounded ; the little urchins crowded round him when he came amongst them, and with all the smiling and innocent arts of their age sought to attract his notice, which, in truth, was never withheld.

He taught them better, and more pleasantly than any one else ; and on Lent-Sundays it was the pride and the marvel of the congregation to hear how well the young creatures said the catechism, after the second lesson, and how gently and clearly their pastor explained it to them. As might be inferred from the skilful simplicity of his teaching, Mr. M'Coy was an exceedingly clever man ; a good classical scholar (though of that his people could not judge) an accomplished musician—as the goodness of the church music testified—and a person of refined taste and keen perception of the beautiful ; witness thereof being found in the exterior and interior of the parsonage, and in the cultivation of a more refined neatness than usual

amongst the peasantry under his influence. This quick-sighted intelligent man was not slow in perceiving that John Page and our little Audrey were no common children; the former from his affliction, and the latter from being Mrs. M'Coy's godchild had indeed come more immediately under his notice than the other children of the parish, and he took some pains in cultivating the quick intellect and ready reason of the boy and in developing the slower, timid and more poetic mind of the wee damsel.

One evening, as Mr. M'Coy was slowly returning from a visit to a sick person, he chanced to pass the cottage of the schoolmistress, and pausing at the wicket to look at some unusually fine balsams in the little garden (he was extremely fond of flowers), he heard Audrey's voice, reading to little Johnnie. Pleased at the softness of the young girl's tones, he opened the gate, walked up to the porch, and found his two pupils within it; Johnnie lying as usual on his couch, with a pleased smile lurking in his beauti-

ful eyes, and Audrey seated on a low stool beside him, holding on her knees a very large thick book. She ceased reading the moment she saw Mr. M'Coy, and would have risen; but he bade her sit still, and, laying his hand on her head, enquired what she was reading.

"Father's old book, sir, please," was the timid reply, and Mr. M'Coy, smiling at the simple answer, bent down to obtain a clearer knowledge of the work. He half started as he exclaimed,

"The Winter's Tale! Why, child, do you read Shakspeare?"

"We read this book, sir, when we have time," said Audrey shyly—not quite understanding why it was called "Shakspeare."

"And Shakspeare wrote it, Audrey, you know," interposed Johnnie patronisingly; "don't you remember that I showed you his name, 'William Shakspeare' in the first leaf, and at the back?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed the little girl, blushing; "I ought to have recollected."

“Very strange!” murmured the Rector.  
“How old are you, Audrey?”

“I’m in my thirteen, sir,” replied the child, in rustic phrase.

“But you can’t understand what you are reading?”

“Not all of it, sir; no more can Johnnie; but we like it better than any playing book we have. Please, sir, we like to hear and to read the Bible too,” went on the child more boldly—she had a dim fear that her favourite volume might be forbidden—“and we can’t understand *that quite* either.”

“Very well argued, little woman,” said the Rector, laughing; “very well indeed.”

“And Audrey always *does* like things she can’t quite understand,” added Johnnie, encouraged by Mr. M’Coy’s manner; “she says she likes them better than very easy things, like the ‘Busy Bee.’”

“And why, Audrey? Can you tell me?” asked the clergyman, much interested.

Audrey hesitated, and looked bewildered ; she was slow in thinking, and had even a dull manner at times.

“ Try and tell me.”

“ Please, sir, I don’t know ; only I *do* like them best ; just as it is prettier to look at the far away hills, than at things close to us.

“ Hey day !” thought M’Coy, “ Have we an infant genius here ?”

He remained silent for some minutes looking at the child thoughtfully.

“ Audrey,” he said, after that pause, “ what do you think of the people you read about in that book ? Which of them do you like best ? ”

“ Oh, I like so many ! ” exclaimed the child, brightening up, “ I don’t know which best. We like old Adam and merry Touchstone, and the poor lady that died in the cave, (*seemed* to die I mean) and dear old King Lear and his good daughter ; don’t we Johnnie ? Ah ! that was a terrible story ; Johnnie and I both cried for him.”

“ Well, little one, you *do* know something of



what you read, I see—But Audrey I hope you do not neglect any duty for this pleasant amusement? The good people whom Shakspeare loved and wrote of were never idle.”

Audrey hung her head and blushed. Her silence confessed occasional shortcomings in spelling and stitching.

“ Well, if it has lured you from your tasks take care it does so no more. As an amusement, it is not objectionable that you should read a work full of the noblest and truest morality—but little Audrey, remember you have promised “to do your duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call you” and industry especially belongs to it. Take care that your aunt has no cause of complaint as to neglected household assistance or shortcomings at your needle, and I will not forbid a leisure hour or so being given to Shakspeare. He will teach you much that is good, His good women are just such as women should be in all things. Do you remember, Audrey, how Imogen—the lady of the cave—though a princess,

was so skilful in domestic matters, that the hunters said of her, in her assumed character of Fidele ;”

“ But his neat cookery !

He cut our roots in characters ;  
And sauced our broths, as though Juno had been sick  
And he, her dieter.”

Audrey did remember.

“ Then try to be as skilful, and as gentle and affectionate, and you will not have read in vain.”

“ Anna,” said the Rector to his wife on his return home, “ Your little godchild Audrey has more in her than we thought. I always saw she was of a reflective temper and had a quiet enthusiasm about her, which promised, (if soberly directed) to make her a pious and earnest woman ; but she has much more—she is highly imaginative, and moreover a devoted admirer of Shakspeare.”

And he related his discovery, and his conversation with the girl.

“ I am sorry for it,” said Mrs. M‘Coy “ in her station, such a gift as superior talent, can scarcely fail of bringing misery on its possessor.”

“Nay, Anna, don’t say so ; that opinion is a mere conventionalism. You are playing parrot and only repeating what the many have said, rather than your own judgment. Is not talent, especially of the brightest order, ‘a good and perfect gift!’ and such, we are told, ‘cometh from above,’ the gift itself *cannot* therefore be evil ; its abuse alone would make it a cause of woe.”

“I don’t know,” said his wife in an unconvinced tone, “if Audrey has a refined and cultivated intellect, she will be disgusted with those amongst whom she is placed by birth ; she will yearn for better and higher society, and be discontented and unhappy. Imagine a poetic genius wedded to a clown !”

“Again Anna, I tell you, you are supposing the consequence of the *abuse* of the gift, not those of the gift itself ; sanctify it by a gentle, pious, and loving temper and no such evils need be dreaded. In a much higher and educated class of society, one gifted with extraordinary talent can

find as few intellectual equals—spirits with whom he may hold perfect communion—as Audrey will in her humble sphere ; but happily the truly gifted, the *genius* especially, is generally of a genial loving nature, and can find pleasure and see good where duller eyes behold only evil and deformity.”

“ But surely it would not be possible to reconcile literary pursuits with the daily toil of the poor ? How would Audrey’s reading assort with a washing tub, house cleaning, nursing, and mending clothes ? ”

“ Quite as well as it does with your worsted work, housekeeping and gardening and music, my love, only perchance there would be less time for it ; you must remember, I am supposing that Audrey does not abuse her gifts by neglecting duty to indulge her taste.”

“ But I have heard you say yourself, that poor people may be taught too much ? ”

“ Of worthless, trifling, or unsanctified knowledge, yes. Could they be *fully* and perfectly

instructed, and a high and holy direction given to their studies, it were different. It is the little 'learning,' that is "a dangerous thing' Anna."

"And, yet Audrey, under the disadvantages of poverty, can after all obtain no great deal."

"Don't be afraid, Anna, that I am going to make your little godchild a blue. I have no great fancy for learned ladies, much less for learned village gossips; but, as it has pleased heaven to bestow on the child a power of thinking, and a fancy and taste beyond her years and station, I do think we ought to cultivate her talents in a degree, or at least so direct them as to obviate the evil that would attend their abuse."

Mrs. M'Coy was seldom opposed to her husband's opinions, and she no longer argued against the one he now expressed, though in her heart she pitied Audrey for being more gifted than her neighbours and thought it her especial duty from that time to be more than usually earnest with Kate Dabney in advising her to make Audrey a good needlewoman and a careful housewife.

Mrs. M'Coy had amongst other prejudices, imbibed that of believing no woman of talent could possibly work well, and she therefore looked on Audrey's hemming and stitching as a sort of spell to preserve her from the danger of a poetical imagination. Now it is rather remarkable that the very perfectly organized persons who possess talent of the highest order, generally use that most beautiful member, the hand, with almost intuitive skill—(be it remembered that Tasso was the best swordsman in Italy, and Shakspeare doubtless a skilful musician, not to mention the great artists who were also poets and masters of *all* the plastic arts, as Salvator Rosa, Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo,) and Audrey who really was a child of wonderful talent, possessed this power of manipulation in no ordinary degree. Mrs. M'Coy was therefore greatly consoled to find that her godchild could work better than any of her schoolfellows, and looked with less dread on the half hours daily teaching bestowed on her by her good pastor. Thus

Audrey had the best possible training in every way. whilst Mr. M'Coy permitted her beautiful fancy to develop itself, and supplied it with good and pure food, he trained her reason and endeavoured to strengthen by every possible means her principles of piety. He showed her, as she grew older, all the disadvantages and all the actual blessings of her lowly lot; taught her to expect a contest with labour and sorrow, and to meet it with a brave patience and cheerful energy. He strove especially to overcome the dreamy melancholy which was natural to her, and to inspire her with a joyous and happy mode of thinking; and no one was better fitted than himself to give a lesson which his own contented cheerful life so well enforced.

Thus time passed on, and years glided imperceptibly away, unmarked by a single care for Audrey, till she had attained her nineteenth year. Her first sorrow came then,—a very heavy, very bitter one. There had been a species of low typhus raging in the village, and Kate in accordance



bonnet. "Now, mark me, missis, this is the *very* last time you shall go wandering about among all these sick folks—the *very* last time."

And he struck his pipe emphatically on the table.

"I beg your pardon, John," said the little woman, in a much more subdued tone than was at all usual with her when answering a conjugal rebuke; "it is late; but to tell the truth, I ain't very well, and could scarcely get along home, I felt so faint like."

"My dear aunt!" exclaimed Audrey, catching her kinswoman's hand, anxiously. "Oh, uncle! she is as cold as ice, and all of a tremble!"

"Well, and no wonder; I dare say she'll be took very bad before all's over, and who's fault is it?" said Jonathan, grumblingly, but he rose from his seat, and placed Kitty in it; it was a large old easy chair. "Sit down, Kitty, sit down, and Audrey make some ale hot and give her—You'll take my advice another time, I suppose; you'll know whose right now."

Kitty accepted the offered ale, but shivered in a manner that prevented her from holding the small mug steadily.

“ I think I had best go to bed, Audrey,” she said tremulously, “ I feel very bad.”

The terrified and sympathising girl was of the same opinion ; and by her assistance the invalid was speedily placed in a bed which Audrey had taken care to warm for her reception. As soon, however, as Kate had a little recovered the shivering and deadly chill from which she was suffering, she insisted on her niece returning to Jonathan, and seeing that he had his supper comfortably. With a sad heart Audrey obeyed. She found her uncle standing by the fire, gazing into it with a disturbed, thoughtful brow.

“ How is she now ? ” he asked anxiously.

“ A little better, uncle ; and she hopes you will have your supper at once, and not be uneasy about her.”

“ No, Audrey,” said the sexton decisively,

with her usual kindliness, was active in visiting, and to the best of her means aiding, the sufferers. In vain Jonathan, who disliked finding his wife from home, remonstrated with her and bade her “stay at home and mind her own business ;” the little woman would have her way.

“There was Audrey at home,” she said, “to wait upon him and keep him company and she could be very well spared ; she could not find it, in her heart to leave her poor neighbours in illness.”

Jonathan grumbled, but as usual yielded, and Kate went from house to house like a good spirit, comforting and soothing the sick, and helping the very poor from her small savings. Audrey would fain have gone in her stead ; but Kate would not hear of it.

“Elderly folks and such as have been used to sick chambers, don’t take infection as quickly as young people do,” she said, “I can’t allow it. Audrey, and you have no call to fear for me ; I don’t believe that one ever gets hurt by doing one’s duty.”

Audrey readily imbibed this cheerful faith ; it was in accordance with her somewhat fanciful notions of a good providence ; she had yet to learn that death stands in the path of duty, as well as in that of self indulgence and sin ; and happy is it for his victims when the mighty one meets them there.

One evening Jonathan and Audrey waited supper for her much later than usual, and the sexton, who hated any delay in his meals, grew cross and sullen, puffed the smoke from his pipe angrily, and would not be amused by his young companion's best efforts to entertain him. As the cuckoo clock proclaimed an hour later than the one fixed for his favourite repast even Audrey grew uneasy, and was about to ask if she should go in search of her aunt, when the latch was lifted and Kate entered, looking very pale.

"A pretty time of night this, Kitty, for a man to be waiting for his supper, and no wife to do anything for him," exclaimed Jonathan, angrily, as she hastily laid aside her shawl and

in some way beneficial to the sufferer, though she was unable to hear his prayers.

On Sunday morning the clerk was, of course, compelled to be absent longer than usual to assist at the morning service, but it was with a heavy heart he left his home, and with many injunctions to Audrey to send for him if his wife grew worse. He found some consolation, however, in the midst of his trouble, from the increased respect and affection with which he was greeted in the churchyard by the villagers, and from the kindly sympathy expressed for him. They all loved Kate, and when Mr. M'Coy, in a grave solemn voice asked the prayers of the congregation for "Catherine Dabney," it was not only old Jonathan that bowed his head and sobbed; there was scarcely a dry eye in the church.

Meantime a change took place in the patient; even about that very time she fell asleep tranquilly, and awoke an hour afterwards quite collected and sensible.

"Is it you, Audrey?" she said, faintly. "I

have been very ill, have I not?" And she passed her hand across her brow.

"Very ill, dear aunt; but you are better now, much better; you will soon get well," exclaimed the delighted girl.

"I don't know. I feel very feeble," said Catherine, and a long pause followed her words. Audrey stole out of the room and dispatched Dame Oliver for the doctor. He had desired her to summon him in case of any change in her aunt. When she returned to the bedside Kate spoke again :

"I have seen so much of this fever, Audrey," she said, "that I fear I mayn't get over it. I have such a sad sinking at my heart. If it should please the Lord to take me, you must do all you can for your uncle, my child. He'll miss me sadly, poor soul, for he wants as much looking after as a baby."

There was a pause, broken only by Audrey's suppressed sobs; she could not speak.

"Promise me to do every thing to make him

“ I shall go first for the doctor. Kitty’s caught the fever, mark me now ; and if he don’t come and give her something by the morning she’ll be as bad as old Sims, who was in such a dilemma that he didn’t know nobody round about him.”

Audrey gladly seconded this resolution, and Jonathan departed on his errand, whilst the girl, after replenishing the fire and putting every thing in neat order against his return, stole back to the bedside of poor Kitty, whose shivering fit was now succeeded by a burning fever.

Dr. Penrose speedily obeyed the summons, and, after an examination of the patient, pronounced her infected with the prevalent plague of the village. The prophecy proved but too correct. For days Kate was in the delirium which Jonathan had feared, and knew not the kind and gentle face that bent over her, the loving hand that smoothed her pillow. The poor sexton was nearly wild with grief ; he never had suspected how dearly he prized his little



wife till he was about to lose her. He forgot his dignity and his long words, and even his usual care for his own comfort, and, unless when compelled by his duty to be absent from the cottage, stood about in a condition of most uncomfortable, helpless woe, holding an unlighted pipe in his hand, and hanging on Audrey's report of her patient as on a sentence of life and death. He did not very often go into the sick chamber; he could do no good, he said, and could not bear to see her suffer. Dame Oliver's services were engaged to assist Audrey in her exhausting task of watching and nursing, but the tender-hearted girl availed herself but little of the old woman's aid; she could not trust another with such a precious charge. Her great support was a daily visit from the Rector, who devoted his time wholly to the care of his suffering flock, and regretted deeply the illness of his active little assistant and coadjutor. Poor Jonathan, too, was somewhat comforted by these calls from his revered master, and seemed to have a vague idea that they were

happy, Audrey," she went on, "and humour his little fancies. He is a good kind man on the whole; and anybody might be happy with him, who knew how to please him." She paused again.

"Indeed, indeed I will!" sobbed Audrey; "but you will get well. Oh! I know you will get well. Our prayers will surely be heard."

"Dear, no! not if God, who sees the future, and has been good to me all my life long, thinks it best for me to die. His will be done—though I would have liked to live longer for your sake and Jonathan's."

There was another long, tearful pause—it was again broken by the sick woman.

"Audrey, you have had book learning, and know a deal more than your uncle, and so he can't seem so clever to you as he does to me; but don't let him see it. Ask him now and then to teach you or tell you something he knows; it will please him, and he won't miss his stupid little Kitty so much. And promise me never to leave him, will you, dear?"

“ Dear aunt, dear aunt, you will break my heart.”

And Audrey sobbed bitterly.

“ Heyday,” said Dr. Penrose, opening the door, “ these sounds are not good for my patient. Why, Audrey ! fie, child, you should know better ; go down stairs for a few minutes, whilst I see how your aunt is.”

Audrey obeyed, and in an agony of grief waited his opinion in the little parlour. It was some time before he joined her, and then he looked grave and sad.

“ Audrey,” he said, “ for your aunt’s sake you must command your feelings, and not disturb her by this passionate grief ; if you cannot practise self command, I shall forbid your being with her.”

“ Indeed, indeed,” sobbed Audrey, “ I could not help it ; she said she was dying, she spoke as if there was no hope, no—”

She could not proceed.

“ Alas, Audrey,” said the doctor kindly,

“there is but little; she is sinking fast, I fear, and I am now going to summon her husband, and to ask the good Rector—service must be just ended—to administer to her the holy sacrament. Come, come, you must not faint! You must struggle with your grief, for her sake. Be brave, Audrey, and bear up, that you may soothe her and comfort your uncle.”

And after giving her a little water and partially restoring her composure, the worthy man hastened on his charitable errand. We will not dwell upon the scene that followed. Unselfish and loving to the last, Kate died as she had lived, thinking of and caring for others. Just as the sabbath evening closed she expired, smiling faintly but tenderly on her husband and Audrey, and murmuring a gentle blessing.

Not then; not even in the bitterness of their first agony of sorrow, did either Jonathan or Audrey fully comprehend and realise the greatness of their loss. It was afterwards, when

haunted by the ghosts of her virtuous and kind ways, and loving words, that they knew how precious a treasure slumbered beside Audrey's mother in the quiet, solemn churchyard.

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## CHAPTER IV.

AUDREY'S best comforter in her deep affliction, was the cripple Johnnie. Those can best soothe the sorrowing, who know what suffering is by experience; and the poor young man, still bound by infirmity to his couch, had learned the stern lesson during long years of physical and mental pain. He sympathised, also, sincerely and deeply in Audrey's grief; Kate had been especially kind and tender towards him, and he could not put away the mournful recollection of her loss, as those can who mix in the daily toil and bustle of life. But his sorrow though likely to be even more lasting than that of his old play-fellow, was less vehement and demonstrative;

and when, weeks after the event, Audrey, still in ceaseless tears, sat beside his sofa, and declared "that she never could be happy any more; that life was become a burden to her, she was so sad;" he reproved her, gravely but gently.

"Dear Audrey," he said, "your excessive sorrow is becoming sinful. Forget the grave, and think of the glory beyond it. Remember that your grief is a selfish one; your aunt's happiness being its cause."

"Oh, don't so miscall it, Johnnie. I would have died, that she might be happy; but she *was* happy here, and I did *so* love her," sobbed the girl. "I shall never love anybody else again, as I did aunt Kitty. Everything is changed since she is gone. All is grown sad—desolate at home. I miss her everywhere and in all things. When I wake in the morning, it is to a sense of having lost something never to be regained; the very sunshine looks sadly down upon me. And then her vacant place by the fire, and the silence where all was once merry talking, and—and—"



Audrey burst into a fresh fit of grief. Johnnie was much moved.

“Audrey,” he said, “you are a dear, affectionate girl, and one cannot but love you all the better for your tender heart ; but you must indeed try to forget your aunt. Nay, don’t look so reproachfully at me ; I mean only that you must try not to let the thought that she is dead, so haunt you. Think of her as one gone from you only for a time, for her own good, and try to occupy the weary years till your re-union, in acts for which she may hereafter approve you.”

“I know that all you say is quite right, Johnnie ; I have heard the like from Mrs. M’Coy several times ; but I *cannot* feel as I ought. Oh ! John, you don’t know—much as you loved aunt Kitty—what a loss her death is to me ; it is all very well for people who don’t know sorrow to talk of being resigned to it.”

John’s eyes glistened for an instant, and his voice trembled slightly as he said, “Nay, Audrey,

it is those who suffer *most*, that learn soonest to say, ‘ God’s will be done.’ ”

There was a mournful submission in the tone in which these words were uttered, that struck Audrey with the sudden conviction that she was talking to one who had been, and was, more sorely tried than she herself. It was strange, but till that moment she had never fully comprehended the trial such a life as his must be—so dependant on the kindness and care of others—so full of pain and weariness.

“ John,” she exclaimed, “ dear John, do forgive me for being so very selfish ! You have much to bear yourself ; but you are so meek and patient, that one quite forgets there is any reason to pity you.”

“ And to speak truly,” he replied cheerfully, “ I don’t think there is, Audrey. If I have some heavy afflictions, I have many great blessings. If I had been a strong, hale fellow, able to run about, and enjoy the mere animal life we all possess, I should not have received so much help,

nor have had so much leasure to cultivate the better life that belongs to my soul and mind. So I don't know that I am to be pitied, Audrey, after all. Still there have been times when I couldn't take this bright view of the matter ; when I have had a hard struggle to say, "Thy will be done," for that will ties me to a bed of nearly constant pain, and makes me, in my manhood, dependent as an infant on my poor old granny."

"Johnnie," said the girl, looking earnestly on his beaming countenance, "I wish I were like you. You do indeed teach one how to suffer."

"Nay, Audrey, it would be much more noble of you to resign your aunt to Him who gave her, cheerfully and submissively, than it is for me, with all my real blessings, not to complain, because some are withheld. Dear, you used to wish you could be like the brave and noble women we have read about, who were so lion-hearted in danger, and so meek in sorrow ; try now, Audrey, to imitate them ; do, dear."

“I will,” she said, more firmly; “but it is a resolution easy to make, and difficult to keep.”

“Nay, it will become easy if you pray earnestly, Audrey, and if you *make* yourself think of other things. Don’t be idle for a moment; you must have much to do in the house now, and your uncle requires amusement, and attention. Be very active, Audrey, and Sorrow will shrink away from you, or, at least her ugly face will grow fairer.”

And Audrey did try to follow the youth’s advice; but her extreme sensibility and natural tenderness—awakened for the first time—were not easily controlled. She wept less; but her manner assumed a soft melancholy, and though Jonathan had no reason to complain of the slightest neglect, and though his house was as well ordered, his meals as punctual, and all his bodily comforts quite as well cared for as when Kate Dabney lived, he *did* miss her cheerful, merry ways, and found his home dull. In truth, though Audrey could be very gay when

excited by the mirth of others, and she had always caught the infection of her aunt's cheerfulness, she was naturally too thoughtful to be merry without some exciting cause, and Jonathan's ponderous stupidity and solemn way of talking and thinking, when not counterpoised by another's glee, acted unfavourably upon her spirits. Both, therefore, were glad of any opportunity to spend an evening with their neighbours; Audrey rejoiced as much, or more, at the possibility of passing a few hours in chatting with Johnnie and dame Page, than the sexton did at smoking a pipe at farmer Morgan's, or drinking a dish of tea with Miss Skrimpton, the village dressmaker.

As this latter individual is to play an important part in our Audrey's story, we beg leave to introduce her to our readers more particularly. Miss Skrimpton had one characteristic very strongly developed, both personally and mentally, and for it we know no more appropriate appellation than *tightness*. She was very tall and thin, and her figure had a look of intense compression,

especially about the waist, which was small enough to have excited the marvel of an anatomist, even although it was surmounted by a narrow pair of shoulders. Her dress was fitted very closely over her stiff spare form; so as to display the numberless hooks and eyes which formed its fastenings, and which, somehow, bore an uncomfortable resemblance to the row of very small, peaked teeth, that Miss Skrimpton's thin and drawn-back lips constantly displayed. This tight look extended to her skin itself, which was drawn over very high cheek bones, and an equally sharp nose, and had acquired over the latter feature an unusual redness, either by the contact with bone to which it was exposed, or by the tightening to which Miss Skrimpton subjected her waist. Her eyes were very small, round, and beadlike, and her thin hair was banded back over a narrow brow, and tied so pitilessly at the back, that the roots appeared compelled to cling to the skin with desperate tenacity in order to keep their places. Miss

Skrimpton's intellect and heart were as narrow and compressed as her person. There seemed no room in that form for warm and kindly emotions to expand, and for once the form was a faithful index of the dweller within it. She was suspicious, pettish, shrewish, and mean; but withal *very* industrious, neat and cleanly. She had never been intimate with poor Kate Dabney, whom she had always derided, as "by no means genteel," for Miss Skrimpton abhorred laughter as much as the courtly Chesterfield did; but after Kate's death she showed much sympathy with Jonathan, and invited him several times to tea with her. The neighbours, with whom she was not popular, though they respected her, laughed at the sudden friendship, and hinted that the damsel's regard for their lost Catherine, and the care she took never to miss church now, had their origin in her desire to be mistress of the sexton's pretty cottage.

"But she won't be no such thing, dame, mark my words," said Mrs. Ford, "Jonathan



Dabney, if he does marry, will choose a better than she; after such a comely woman as Kate Woodford was, 'taint to be supposed as he'd take up with Ann Skrimpton. No, no; I know Jonathan's mind as well as ere a soul in Charlie-wood, and I can tell madam that he has no thoughts of her."

Nor in truth had he; but he thought a great deal of himself, and somehow that self became gradually identified with thoughts of Ann Shrimpton. For who was there in all the village that talked to him so much of that beloved individual as she did? What was Widow Ford's prettiest cap, even though Miss Shrimpton made it, when set in opposition to the pleasant flattery that assured the pompous sexton "he read better than the Rector;" that "he should have been a bishop, he looked so like one;" "it was quite a privilege to ask his advice;" &c., &c. Ah! Mrs. Ford! Jonathan Dabney does not want to admire, he would rather be admired himself; your pretty ribbons and jolly face are of no avail,

nor your kind heart neither. Miss Skrimpton is his mirror, his echo, and he loves himself intensely; you can't rival Jonathan in his own heart. Moreover, the sexton had a high idea of Miss Skrimpton's gentility. During her apprenticeship in a large town she had picked up a little bad French, with which she occasionally silenced her neighbours, and her manner and style of dress were both, in his opinion, greatly superior to the rustics round. Therefore, whilst our unsuspecting Audrey sat reading or singing beside John Page's couch, her uncle went a wooing to the village sempstress.

It was not quite a year after Kate's death, when the sexton avowed his intention of marrying again to his niece. The avowal was made with some embarrassment. Audrey was sitting by the fire mending his stockings, he was in his own corner smoking, and neither had spoken for some time.

"Audrey," said the sexton, breaking the silence, "Audrey, you must find it dull some-

times, I am afraid, with only me at home, for though I am desirous of making you happy, yet the presence of a man of my age can't be very exhilarating to a juvenile person."

Audrey looked up in surprise. Her uncle delivered this exordium with the air of one who was repeating a lesson, and used as she was to his long words and occasional pomposity, she could not but think that the harangue presaged something extraordinary.

"I dull! oh, no," she said;" "thank you for thinking of me, uncle. I am never dull; I am always so busy, and you are so very kind to me."

"You are a good girl, Audrey; but I know I am but a dull body to live with, and so, in short, I am going to bring you another aunt home to take my blessed Catherine's place."

Audrey uttered a faint cry, and let fall her work.

"Uncle."

"Ay, child," continued the sexton, gathering

“I know no absolute evil of Skrimpton,” said the Rector, “and that alone, Audrey, would not justify me in advising your uncle not to marry her. She is disagreeable in manner, I allow; but that is a matter of taste and opinion. She is honest, industrious, and respectable. I cannot interfere; nay, more, I must desire you to receive your new relative kindly, and not to allow either her or Jonathan to know that you have asked your godmother’s interference or mine in the affair, an act which only your simplicity, and wish to fulfil your promise in its utmost strictness, could excuse.”

Audrey, half sorry for her impetuosity, promised to try and submit cheerfully to the threatened infliction, and after listening to much good advice from the amiable Rector’s wife, returned home, resolved even to try and like the disagreeable dressmaker.

The next Sunday Jonathan’s banns were published.

## CHAPTER V.

It was even as Audrey had anticipated. The sexton's bride scarcely permitted him to enjoy a second honeymoon. All was soon changed in the dear old house of our rural heroine's youth. Dwellings grow in some indescribable way very much like their occupants, and as Kate's bright ways and loving heart had shed an air of comfort and happiness round the sexton's home, so the new Mrs. Dabney (whom even *we* cannot venture to call by her Christian name) managed to impart to it a look of cool restraint and stiff discomfort, which it would have puzzled any one to explain, the changes which produced it were so slight and little apparent. Audrey

courage, "a lady as lives in this place has consented to be my wife; and it's one that I may hope to have much conjugal felicity with."

"Dear uncle," said Audrey, who had by this time gathered her self-possession, "I am very glad of it, if it makes you happy; but who," her lip quivered a little, "who is to fill dear aunt Kitty's place?"

"Miss Annette Shrimpton," was the reply.

"Oh, uncle, dear uncle, don't say so, for your own sake! Not that cross, stiff, heartless woman; oh, don't marry her; she will make you miserable; I know she will," exclaimed the girl earnestly.

"For shame, Audrey" said the sexton, rising in great anger; "is this the way you speak of your neighbours? Much good your book learning has done you, if it has not taught you better than to be so malicious and jealous. Hush! I won't hear a word more from you about the matter. I have made up my mind; you are to receive Miss Annette Skrimpton as my wife and

your aunt, and having spoke thus definitely I expect you to obey."

The sexton, as he uttered these words, with a majestic air took his hat, and turning a stern glance on his niece left the house. Audrey, overwhelmed with grief and dismay, burst into tears. She would have welcomed, with all the warmth of a kindly heart, the widow Ford, or any other of the village marriageables; but ever since she could remember, she had had a mingled fear and dislike to the dressmaker. She was certain, also, that Jonathan was destroying his own happiness by trusting it to Miss Skrimpton, and she determined, in accordance with her promise to her dying aunt, to do all she could to frustrate such an intention. The next morning she ran up to the Vicarage to ask the Rector and her godmother to interfere, and, if possible, to persuade the sexton to abandon his intention; but both the clergyman and his wife, though they pitied the poor girl's distress, and agreed that Jonathan might have chosen better, refused to interfere.



said it was an exceedingly vulgar book, in her opinion, and quite unfit for me, and that she should lock it up; she did not approve of stage plays for young people.”

“And has she done so?” asked the youth, greatly interested.

“Ah, yes! and my uncle won’t ask her to give it back to me. He is quite ruled by her, Johnnie, and—this vexes me more than all—he thinks her so much superior to dear sweet aunt Kitty, and listens to her as if she were an oracle of wisdom, instead of what she is, a stupid, conceited woman.”

Audrey spoke warmly, almost angrily.

“Patience, dear Audrey, patience! said her friend, gently, “You will make yourself very unhappy if you suffer little things to vex you thus. You must remember that Mrs. Dabney has a bride’s influence over her husband just now; his admiration and deference are quite natural.”

“But very provoking,” exclaimed the girl—  
“oh! if *only* she could not speak those horrid

French words through her nose, or play these dreadful tunes upon her jingling old piano, it would be better. Johnnie, you know how I love church music, it always seems to draw me away from earth, to make me as happy almost as we hope to be hereafter, and how I delight in listening to Mrs. Ford's full mellow voice when she sings old ballads by the fire-light—and how even a street organ makes me happily sad, but indeed I feel, when Mrs. Dabney plays and sings, as if I hated music. The sounds jar on my ear and pains me—they are so piercingly sharp and uncomfortable.”

John Page laughed.

“Such might be expected from Miss Annette,” he said “and, Audrey, I really am sorry for you, and I am sure you must be very uncomfortable, but after all I feared you would have had more serious causes of annoyance. I confess I feared your exclamation of ‘Fie how the treble jars,’ would have applied rather to Mrs. Dabneys temper than her voice and piano.”

felt this first consequence of the unwelcome arrival of her second aunt deeply. Mr. M'Coy had judged correctly when he said, that the right cultivation of her talents would not make the country girl discontented with her station and associates; Audrey did not love Jonathan or Dame Page, Dame Oliver, or Mrs. Ford a whit the less because they did not understand her fully; nor did she despise them because she was so greatly their superior in education. Her intellect had been directed to the pursuit of wisdom, not of mere knowledge; and amongst simple, loving hearts she often recognised traits of that noblest and most divine gift, though shown in uncouth ways or rude phraseology. But now she was brought into intimate contact with narrowness of feeling as well as of intellect; with affectation and vulgarity instead of mere homeliness, and she shrank from such fellowship.

Mrs. Dabney was nevertheless considered by the villagers as the only one amongst them fitted by education to be a companion for poor Kate's

clever niece ; for she had been “to boarding school,” as they phrased it, could speak French, and play Scotch reels and country dances on the piano—and was “quite genteel in dress, manner and conversation.” In fact, she had had precisely the kind of teaching to which Mrs. M‘Coy objected ; a smattering of knowledge and of showy and useless accomplishments which rendered her profound ignorance disagreeable, and herself so conceited, that self-knowledge, with its attendant humility, could not penetrate through the thick veil thus spread over her heart and mind.

Perhaps no greater irritation could have been devised for an enthusiastic poetic temperament like Audrey’s, than such a companion. To John Page, her ever kind and sympathising companion, she imparted her vexation, with some little shame that “such nonsense should vex her.”

“It is very provoking though,” she added. “She took up our dear Shakspeare the other day, Johnnie, and after looking at it for some time

“I would rather bear the bad temper than the bad music,” replied Audrey quickly ; “as yet however she has not been cross to me—but she has made home wearisome and uncomfortable—Oh sweet aunt Kate, how I miss you.”

And Audrey, leaning her head on the elbow of the old sofa, wept bitterly. John Page was much distressed ; he soothed her tenderly ; spoke hopefully of the future, and was still engaged in his gentle task, when his grandmother entered the room. Dame Page dearly loved Audrey ; the girl had been as a daughter to her, and she was indignant with Jonathan for giving her a sort of stepmother ; the more so, as the one chosen to rule over her darling had been heard to express her contempt for the acquirements of the village schoolmistress. She was anxious now to learn the cause of Audrey’s tears, but though she confided all her troubles to John, she was not the girl to talk of the little domestic affairs of her family abroad, even to one as dear as Dame Page, (who, moreover, bore somewhat the reputation of a gossip,) and she told her only a portion of the

truth by replying that she had been speaking of her aunt Kitty, and could not think of her without tears."

"Ay, ay," responded the dame shaking her head mournfully, "You have cause to rue the day you lost her, Audrey—but cheer up, my dear, cheer up—you'll have a house of your own I hope one of these days, and a kind husband to take your poor aunty's place, and Johnnie and I shall rejoice to see it, shan't we, Johnnie? why, bless us, how pale the boy is—Johnnie, darling are you ill?"

And she rose in some alarm; Audrey also sprang to her feet, and ran to fetch water, for the poor invalid's face was pale as death, his eyes closed, and he made a vain effort to speak. Audrey returned in haste, bathed his brow and hands, and assisted the dame in applying the usual restoratives. In a few seconds, he sighed deeply and then spoke.

"I am better now; it was a spasm—a sudden pain dear granny, don't be frightened Audrey."

He paused.

“I am so glad,” said the girl, “oh Johnnie, I was dreadfully frightened! but are you really better? Dame, shall I run for the doctor at once?”

“No, no, dear” said John faintly, “I am better, quite well now, Audrey.”

“What made you ill do you think? Dear, dear, what could have been the matter?” ejaculated the women together.

“Nothing but a sudden pain, granny—caused by my unhappy affliction,” said John Page, with a touch of bitterness in his tone, “Hunchbacks and cripples must suffer pain more frequently than others you know.”

“Dear!” exclaimed the old woman, astonished equally at the tone and words, for John had never hitherto named or complained of his deformity, “dear me!”

“I am afraid it was more my fault,” said Audrey, “I have been so vexing his kind heart with my selfish complaints. Do forgive me Johnnie, I won’t do so any more.”



“Your fault, Audrey, oh, no!” But as he spoke John Page’s brow crimsoned.

“I, too, who have so much less reason to complain than you have who never utter a murmur,” went on the young girl penitently, “I ought to be and I am ashamed of having been so peevish.”

“Audrey you will really pain me, if you blame yourself so without cause; it was nothing that you said made me ill, nor did you tire me. It was a sudden spasm.”

“Then do see Dr. Penrose; pray do for my sake, Johnnie,” she entreated “and let him give you something to make you quite well. Oh! do pray. What would become of me if you were to be taken ill or die—you, who are all I have in the world now.”

He took her hand and kissed it, “Dear Audrey,” he said, “I will see the doctor; I will do everything you bid me.”

“That’s a good boy!” she exclaimed joyfully, “I will go for him at once; good bye for a little while, dame Page.”

And smiling an adieu at her friend, Audrey darted off in search of the doctor. Johnnie followed her with his eyes till she was out of sight, and then closed them with a deep sigh.

“ Johnnie, darling, do drink this little drop of mint water, it will do you good “ said dame Page interrupting his reverie, “ it’s made from our own herb beds and is a remedy in spasms equal to any doctor’s stuff.”

With a quiet smile the youth took the cup she proffered and drained its contents.

“ It will be just as useful as anything the doctor may give me, granny,” he said, “ he can, I know well, do nothing for me, but I couldn’t bear to vex Audrey.”

“ Ah ! poor dear ! no, she has enough to vex her now. But we must hope times will grow better ; she’ll get a husband.”

“ Granny, don’t say that,” interrupted John a little peevishly, “ I don’t like to think of Audrey’s marrying and going away ; or caring less for us than she does now ; don’t say so again, please.”

“ Well I won’t, dear, if you don’t like it; but it is to be expected Johnnie, for sure and certain Audrey is uncommon pretty, tho’ she be a little pale for a country lass.”

John made no answer, but his heart gave only too ready an assent to the latter part of his grandam’s speech ; he acknowledged that Audrey was beautiful, tho’ it was for higher and nobler gifts he loved her ; how well, he had but just learned, when the pang of jealousy his grandmother’s words awoke, had shown him that he loved Audrey as his own life.

## CHAPTER VI.

As we have said the sexton's honeymoon scarcely waned, ere his bride allowed him to perceive the very decided contrast between her character and that of his first wife. Her admiration for his talents waxed daily fainter ; her deference to his judgment altogether disappeared ; her voice, hitherto softened into the meekest of mincing tones, grew sharper and louder, and her timidity, which he had so often lauded to Audrey, ere he brought her to his home, changed to a firm, determined manner, which enabled her to brave even the most solemn and majestic demonstrations of Jonathan's " awful rule and right supremacy."

The good man was amazed and puzzled. He made several slow and ponderous efforts to assert his never hitherto disputed authority; but his rival in conjugal sway was so sharp and quick, and defended her own will and way in such voluble and unanswerable terms, (for some of them were French) that he was compelled to yield, and reluctantly to own in his inmost heart, that Mademoiselle Annette and Mrs. Dabney were two different personages. This mental admission, though forced on him, was most reluctantly made. No one likes to own, even to himself, that he has been deceived or befooled by a woman, common as such occurrences are, and Jonathan, therefore, preferred wilfully closing his eyes on the conviction, and finding arguments to reconcile himself to his lot.

“It could not but be said,” he thought, as he sat smiling thoughtfully beside his meagre cinder fire, “it could not but be said that *his* wife was vastly genteel. Didn’t she speak French as if she had been used to *parley vous* all

her life? And hadn't she her piano just like the rector's wife? and was she not related to very genteel people." Certainly she had a right to be looked up to; which poor Kitty could not be said to have had, for she, dear soul, was but housemaid at the rectory when he married her, and had only a few simple plain clothes to her back. "Now Annette," went on the pipe-soliloquy, "has a deal of smart dress, and a little sum in the Saving's bank, and altogether, therefore, one can't but expect that she should like to have her own way, and that I should let her have it."

And in this mental comparison, sweet Kate, with all the treasure of love and mirth and kindness, active youth and contented industry, which she had brought him, sunk quite beneath the shrewish Annette's gentility, old piano, fine clothes, and pounds in the saving's bank. Alas! Jonathan, what a cloud obscured thy mental vision. But let the reader forgive the poor old sexton's folly; if he pause to think, he may re-

member some parellel cases in which less excuse could be made for such false judgment.

Mrs. Dabney was not a little vain of her "grand connections," as she styled them; two of whom, in fact "keppit house wi' great folks," as Tabbie boasted of doing; one being house-keeper in the family of a baronet residing some nine miles from Charliewood; the other filling the situation of lady's maid to an earl's daughter. The sexton's bride, during her days of celibacy, had made two memorable visits to both these distinguished individuals, and her memory was stored in consequence with a list of lords and ladies, their sayings and doings, dress, &c., with which she duly impressed the mind of her listening and admiring husband, and wearied the ears of the somewhat prejudiced Audrey.

At first it is true the girl was curious to know all about the great people, who were painted in her fancy after the chivalrous and princely Italian dukes, or the lordly English barons of Shakspeare; but Mrs. Dabney's accounts of high life



were so *jejune*, uninteresting, and opposed to these mental pictures, that Audrey could not bring herself to put faith in them; or if she did, found the formal detail of how many times lady Grimley drank tea, and how her little dog was washed and decked with ribbon, and taken to her every morning before she rose, and placed on her pillow, exceedingly tiresome and stupid.

One evening whilst Mrs. Dabney was thus discoursing, Jonathan listening, and Audrey fancying pictures in the fire, they were startled by a rap at the cottage door. The young girl rose to open it, and was startled by the apparition of a footman in a gay livery, just such as her aunt had been describing a minute before. He asked to see Mrs. Dabney, and on being admitted, delivered to her a small parcel, and a large letter fastened with a very large red seal.

“From Mrs. Hardy, mem, if you please,” he said, “with her kind regards to you and Mr. Dabney, and her congratulations on a late ’appy hevent.”

And having thus announced the nature of his embassy, the footman passed his fingers lightly through his powdered curls, and turning his eyes upon Audrey, surveyed her from head to foot with a half patronizing, half coxcombical air. The girl turned shyly away, and hastened to light a candle, in order that Mrs. Dabney—who was uttering shrill exclamations of pleasure, and words of constrained civility to the messenger, to whom she was afraid of being too hospitable lest her dignity might be thereby compromised—should read her letter. Jonathan, however, bade the young man sit down, and offered him a mug of beer, which was accepted. Meantime, the sexton's wife had opened the packet, and drew forth a smart shawl, a wedding present from her aunt, Sir Philip Beaumont's housekeeper. After a due amount of admiration had been bestowed on it, Mrs. Dabney, with an air of great importance, broke the seal of the letter and commenced perusing its voluminous contents.

“You’ve a very pretty bit of country down

here, sir," said the envoy, as he placed his empty mug upon the table, "a very pretty bit. I don't know as I have seen a prettier anywhere, though I have been a traveller."

"You are quite right in that," replied Jonathan, drawing up his tall form, as if he had received a personal compliment. "I have travelled myself to London and back again, and I haven't seen nothing to compare with Charliewood; and though I say it, as shouldn't say it, since I belong to it, our church is a archiepiscopal wonder."

"Well, there I must say," observed his guest, "I don't think the church is so fine as Notrer Dam, in Paris."

Jonathan looked sternly on the individual who made this heretical assertion, and in a pointed manner, full of dignified rebuke, replied, "Let me tell you, young man, (as it is but my duty to do, being *in* the Church of England) that if you only learn in foreign parts to like popish churches with such awful names, better than your own

in your native land, you had better stay at home."

And the sexton after this harangue resumed his pipe, and puffed very emphatically for some minutes. The travelled youth, very much abashed, looked foolish and attempted no reply. Audrey, quick at feeling for others, forgot the pertness of his first look, and endeavoured to set him at his ease, by asking him if Paris was not a very fine city?

"Yes, Miss, very fine, very grand indeed," said the young man, relieved by the address, and struck by the prettiness of the country girl; "but I can't say I liked it so well as some other places master went to. There was the Tyrol; now you never see such a place as that is. Such mountains! my! the highest hill in these parts is but a pincushion in comparison to them. And such heaps of snow atop of them, which, they do say, never melts."

"Well I declare now, I shall be delighted to go," said Mrs. Dabney, looking up from her

letter. "Mr. Dabney, (she was too genteel to say Jonathan) my aunt has written an invitation for me and Audrey to go over and stay at Crowhurst Park for a week or so, as the house is full of company."

Jonathan looked bewildered ; it always took him a minute or two to comprehend any sudden or unexpected announcement.

"But," he ejaculated after that pause, "you can't go, Mrs. Dabney. What am I to do here by myself?"

"Oh, you shall have Dame Oliver to do for you," she answered quickly ; "but I *must* go."

"Mrs. Hardy 'opes as you will, mem," said the footman ; "for there is more work than the lady's maid can ever get through, she bade me say, and she wants a little help herself."

"True, true," said Mrs. Dabney, colouring a little ; "relations should help one another. I am sure anything I can do, I shall be most happy to assist Mrs. Hardy in, and so will my

niece too. Audrey, you'll like to be of use, I'm sure ; wont you ? ”

Audrey hesitated.

“ I shouldn't like to leave my uncle,” she said timidly, “ he is not used to be without some one who loves him.”

Jonathan laid his large hand caressingly on her shoulder ; she understood the token of approbation, and looked up kindly and affectionately in his face.

“ Nonsense,” said the new aunt snappishly, “ any one would think that your uncle was a fool or a child that he cant be left alone. Why you would make him the laughing stock of the village, if it were known. Tell her, Mr. Dabney, that she is to go, at once, that I may send a message back to my aunt.”

The sexton did not at all like the plan, but he had learned by this time that Mrs. Dabney would have her own way, and he preferred that the assent he knew she would enforce should at least appear a willing one.

“ I quite understand why my aunt will make me go,” she said ; “ there is a great deal of work to do, and she thinks I may be useful now. If my uncle really required me to work for him, I would cheerfully strive to earn money by my needle, but he is very comfortable as we are, and it vexes me greatly to leave him at home all alone. Oh ! Johnnie how I wish you could go and look after him for me.”

“ Would that I could, Audrey,” said the young man, with a sigh, “ but, alas ! I am useless to everybody.”

“ No, indeed you are not ;” she exclaimed earnestly, vexed at the regret her thoughtless speech had caused. “ You are very useful to all who know you. Does not nearly all the village come to John Page for counsel in difficulty, and comfort in trouble ? And truly, John, I am so used to fly to you in all my vexations and bewilderments that I can’t think how I shall manage to remain a whole week away from you.”

“ Ah, Audrey you will be so amused in this



grand house, that you will not have time to miss me.”

“Indeed, indeed, I shall miss you, and the more so, if I am amused—Why Johnnie” with a merry laugh, “do you think I only like to ‘bestow my *tediousness*’ as our old friend Dogberry says, ‘on your worship?’ I like to tell you all my pleasures too, believe me.”

John Page smiled and sighed again ; a jealous fear he vainly sought to stifle haunted him, at this prospect of Audrey’s been seen by strangers, who would, he felt perfectly convinced, forthwith fall in love with his treasure, and seek to win her from him. He could not believe that there existed the person who would be insensible to her charms, since in his opinion the world did not contain her equal. He bade her farewell therefore with solemnity and sadness that half amused at the same time that it puzzled her, for there was no echo in her own heart that could explain the plaintive and tender tone in which it was uttered.

“ Well, if you must go, I suppose you must,” he said, “but it won’t be for long I suppose, wife?”

“ No, only for a week or so,” replied the lady carelessly and she forthwith proceeded to give Benjamin the needful message of thanks to her kinswoman, and the assurance that she and Miss Dabney would be at Crowhurst the day after the morrow.

Jonathan’s assent was thus taken by storm, but Mrs. Dabney who perceived a heavier cloud upon his brow in consequence than she had ever before detected on it, condescended to recommend her plan to his approval by explaining all its advantages, as soon as they were alone. Her kinswoman had written to say they had a house full of company ; that Miss Beaumont’s French maid was not yet come over from Paris, that the young lady (who had recently returned from a long journey), wanted some new dresses made up, that Mrs. Hardy required assistance, and that if Mrs. Dabney could be persuaded to lend her aid or that of her niece (if she were a handy

girl) it would be handsomely remunerated. This last clause had decided the sexton's wife, to wave her new pretensions to dignity, and go to Crowhurst, and it certainly went some way to reconcile Jonathan to his temporary desertion. His vanity was, moreover, a little gratified at the prospect of being able to tell the villagers that his wife had been invited by her relations to Crowhurst Park and had taken his niece with her ; for, of course, Jonathan knew as well as every body else, that it is not necessary to enter into details, and that some honours are more effective at a distance.

Poor Audrey was sadly vexed by this event. She fancied she was in a manner breaking her promise to her dead aunt by obeying Jonathan's reluctant order and leaving him ; and she was very much afraid of going amongst strangers, with only her cross and disagreeable aunt to protect her. It cost her some tears, and was the subject of a long discussion between her and John Page, to whom she managed to steal away, in the course of the morrow.

lay by your bonnets and shawls, and I'll have a dish of tea ready for you in a few minutes."

She conducted them up stairs to a comfortable double-bedded room, in which their simple toilet was speedily completed; Audrey merely smoothing her soft hair, and Mrs. Dabney substituting a remarkably smart cap for her bonnet. On their return to the housekeeper's room they found a substantial meal of tea-cakes and meat awaiting them, over which Mrs. Hardy smilingly presided. By her side sat a stout important looking man, the butler—whom she introduced to her guests as "Mr. Nokes."

"We shall have Mr. Findelkind in by and by," she said, as she poured out the tea, "but he is gone for a ramble in the chase, and as he is never very punctual it is no use to wait for him."

"Is Mr. Findelkind Sir Phillip's gentleman?" asked the sexton's wife.

"Oh, no, Sir Philip's old valet is still with him; he don't like foreign attendants—except a French cook perhaps—indeed he is quite vexed

with my young Lady because she will have a French maid—Mr. Findelkind is a young Tyrolese, he has brought over, to sing in London by and by.”

“Dear me !” ejaculated Mrs. Dabney. “And can he speak English?”

“Yes, tolerably well. He is very quick at picking it up ; but Sir Philip and Miss Beaumont always talk German with him.”

“Miss Beaumont’s grown a fine young lady by this time I suppose.”

“You may say so, indeed ;” replied the housekeeper, “there isn’t such another in England, I’ll answer for it. We are all very proud of her. She’s so grandly beautiful, and so generous, and gracious. She’s more fit to be a queen than a private gentleman’s daughter ; though, to be sure, the Beaumonts have princely blood in their veins, and let me tell you, Mrs. Dabney, spite of all the newfangled notions people are getting in their heads, gentle birth will show itself, and is a very fine thing.”

The journey to Crowhurst was a great enjoyment for a girl who had never been beyond the lanes surrounding her native village, and when the dog cart which had been sent for them drove into a noble chase, and Audrey for the first time beheld a herd of deer grazing beneath magnificent old oaks, she could have fancied herself in Ardenne itself, and eagerly called on her aunt to sympathise in her rapturous admiration. But Mrs. Dabney withheld her approval of the scene, though of unrivalled beauty, observing "that she dared say Audrey, who had never seen the like, might think it very grand, but that *she* had seen Lord Seaford's place, and so of course did not think much of the chase of Crowhurst ;" moreover, she begged Audrey not to seem delighted at all she saw, as it was not genteel to show such feelings.

The girl wondered mentally how Lord Seaford's oaks could surpass the leafy giants before them, but she kept her surprise to herself, and was equally silent when the noble old home of the Beaumont's stood before them, though it quite

satisfied the wildest vision of a lordly palace that had ever possessed her imagination. They drove past a noble portico, and an endless yet symmetrical mass of castellated buildings ere they reached the back entrance of the mansion, and a confused glimpse of sylvan beauty, grand terraces, fountains, and flower-beds swept at the same time before the astonished gaze of Audrey.

She was quite bewildered by so much splendour, and had scarcely recovered her composure, when she was called on to follow her aunt and Benjamin down several long passages leading to the housekeeper's room. Here Mrs. Hardy, a comfortable dame of middle age, received them and gave them a gracious welcome.

"I am quite obliged to you, Annette," she said, "for coming ; I declare to you that I have my hands so full I don't know which way to turn, and what with Sir Phillip filling the house full of company, and Miss Beaumont's maid not arriving, we are all at sixes and sevens. Glad to see you my dear," to Audrey, "come to your room and



“ I am quite of your mind, Mrs. Hardy. I can’t abide low people, or any thing that isn’t genteel. And is there any chance of Miss marrying?”

“ She hasn’t signified any intention of doing so, yet,” replied Mrs. Hardy, with dignity ; “ of course Miss Beaumont may marry any one she chooses, but—”

Here she was interrupted by a servant, who came to say that Miss Beaumont desired to see her immediately, and with an apology for being obliged to leave her visitors, Mrs. Hardy bustled away in obedience to the lady’s summons. The hitherto silent butler, a staid civil man, endeavoured to supply her place in fulfilling all the duties of hospitality, and had gained greatly on Mrs. Dabney’s good graces by the time the housekeeper returned. The good woman entered with a smile, and an exclamation of—

“ Ours is the strangest young lady ! What do you think she wants, niece Dabney ? Your

little girl here, to go and dress her for the grand dinner to-night."

"Audrey!" exclaimed Mrs. Dabney, in a tone of strong dissatisfaction, for she had fully expected to be herself solicited to preside at the heiress's toilette—

"Why, the child never saw a lady except in morning dress, and has no notion of doing hair in any way but as it is on her own head."

"And that is a mighty becoming style anyhow, ma'am," said the butler, gallantly.

"I told my young lady so," went on Mrs. Hardy, "I said, Miss Beaumont, says I, the girl is very young, and has never been in a great house before, nor seen a lady full dressed except in church; she can't be of any use whatsoever. Says she, 'Mrs. Hardy, I saw her in the dog-cart as she passed my window; she is very pretty, and one pretty woman always knows how to dress another. It is my wish you should bring her to dress me.' Well, there was no more to be said,

for Miss Beaumont's wish is a law here—therefore, Miss Audrey, when you've finished tea you must go with me to my lady, for the dressing bell is just about to ring."

"Oh! indeed I can't," said Audrey, very much frightened; "I couldn't dress her, I'm sure; and I am so afraid of her. Please go and tell her again that I am a very stupid, poor country girl, and that I really can't come."

"Oh, you must; there is no saying 'no' to Miss Beaumont, and you need not be afraid of her, for she is very kind and considerate, though a *little* haughty, and fond of her own way. Come, if you've finished your tea, I will take you to her."

"But," interrupted Mrs. Dabney, "did you tell her, aunt, that *I* was here, and that I have had the honour of dressing her very often before?"

"Yes; but it is her whim you see, niece, and she will be obeyed. Come, little one, are you ready?"

Trembling and blushing our poor Audrey

obeyed, and was conducted by the housekeeper up a back staircase into a noble corridor, at the end of which were the apartments of the heiress of Crowhurst. The boudoir appeared to the charmed eyes of the country girl a scene of fairy splendour. Its rose-coloured hangings, the marble statues holding elegant lamps, which stood in each corner of the apartment; the vases full of beautiful flowers, the gilt harp, the scattered books, music, frames for embroidery, the pictures, and the knick-knackeries, formed a brilliant confusion of novel and beautiful objects that half bewildered her; but her attention was drawn from all by the queenly woman who occupied a sofa at one end of the room, and who, on their entrance, laid aside a volume she was reading, and directed the gaze of her brilliant eyes full on the abashed rustic.

Helen Beaumont deserved all the encomiums that her servant had bestowed on her beauty. It was splendid, regal, and commanding. Her face might have served for an artist's study; but

it was forgotten in the surpassing and stately grace of her figure. Audrey's terror was lost in admiration, as this magnificent image of beauty met her eye, and there was an unconscious homage to "the might, the majesty of loveliness," in the low curtsy she dropped to Miss Beaumont.

"So this is your young guest, Hardy," she said, smilingly, "and my attendant that is to be, till Mademoiselle Julie vouchsafes her presence. Well, child, do you think you can manage to dress me?"

"I am afraid not, madam," replied Audrey, in her low, calm tones; "at least, I fear not well, and as you ought to be dressed; but, if it is your wish, I will try."

"Indeed, ma'am," interposed Mrs. Hardy, "indeed, I think you had better have Mrs. Dabney also, she could—"

Miss Beaumont interrupted her rather impatiently.

"No," she replied, "I prefer the rustic taste

of her niece, which I can guide and direct at my pleasure. Come into my dressing-room child, and try if you can arrange my hair as simply and neatly as your own. By the by what is your Christian name?"

"Audrey, Madam."

"Audrey, how came you by such an antiquated one? But I suppose I had better ask that question of your godfathers and godmothers. I rather like it myself, however, and shall call you by it; therefore good Audrey, follow me."

And Miss Beaumont led the way into her dressing room.

Audrey could have believed herself in some palace of fairy land, such as she had read of in Arabian stories, when she stood beside Helen Beaumont, and beheld the splendid accessories of her toilette; And as she brushed out the young lady's long and rich black tresses, her eyes wandered from her task to the open dressing and jewel cases, and to the silver boxes and scent bottles that adorned the table; whilst all the

while Helen watched her in the mirror, amused at the expression of surprise that rested on her modest face, and pleased at the skill and softness of touch with which the girl arranged her hair.

“Very well done!” she said, as Audrey, having completed her task stood waiting the lady’s further orders, “my hair has never looked neater or so simple, and I love simplicity—now give me that pearl tiara, and see if you can help fasten it on my head.”

Audrey suppressed a smile as she extended her hand for the rich ornament, the professed lover of simplicity required; but she managed both the arranging it, and the remainder of the heiress’s toilette so much to her satisfaction that Miss Beaumont, as she prepared to descend to the drawing room, declared Julie herself would not have succeeded better, and that it was quite a pity that a girl possessing a natural genius for dressing people, should be buried in the country. Audrey herself was quite charmed at success of her efforts, and gazed upon Helen’s stately form



robed in black velvet, and at her snowy arms clasped with pearl bracelets, with mingled wonder and admiration. Her taste for the beautiful was for the first time entirely gratified, and she lingered in the boudoir, after Miss Beaumont was gone, examining the pictures and books, till Mrs. Hardy, believing she had lost her way returning to the housekeeper's room, came in search of her.

“So you are still here,” cried the good woman opening the door of the boudoir, “but you need not wait, Miss Beaumont will ring for you when she wants you at night, but that won't be till very late, I am afraid: I am sorry it happens so the very day you come, but you see it was no fault of mine.”

“I don't mind sitting up a little late,” said Audrey good naturedly, “It is quite a pleasure to me to look at that beautiful young lady; and she is so kind, and was so easily pleased.”

“Yes, I dare say; she generally is—she is very good natured and gracious in all her ways,

though sometimes she talks a little as if she were making fun of one ; but I dont mind that ; she is wonderfully sweet tempered, for one that has been so spoiled."

" Sir Philip must be very fond of her," said Audrey, as she followed the housekeeper down the corridor.

" Dear, yes ! he almost worships her ; as he did my poor lady, her mother."

" Has Lady Beaumont been long dead."

" About twenty years ; she died when Miss Beaumont was near three years old."

" Alas !" said Audrey, " she was early motherless."

" And it is happy for her that Sir Philip never gave her a stepmother, for he was quite a young man when my lady died ; but there never was such a constant-hearted, noble gentleman."

By this time they reached the housekeeper's room, in which Mrs. Dabney, a little out of humour at Miss Beaumont's caprice in favour of her niece, still sat, looking tighter and sharper

than ever. The butler was gone, his place was supplied by a tall and very handsome young man, who rose as they entered and bowed to Audrey.

“This is Mr. Findelkind my dear, of whom I told you,” said the housekeeper, “the foreign gentleman who sings so well. Perhaps,” in a whisper, “he will favour us by and bye.”

Audrey hoped he would, but she did not say so, and took in silence the seat he offered her. An half hour of constraint and dulness followed, for Mrs. Hardy was bustling in and out of the room during the time, and Mrs. Dabney, who was bitterly jealous and wished as much as she could to punish her niece’s involuntary offence, kept her lips firmly compressed as if determined that nothing should make her break the silence. Young Findelkind, who spoke English imperfectly, (though he understood it well) and was, moreover, awed by the sternness of his elder companion, ventured only an occasional sentence to which Audrey timidly replied; but his gaze frequently rested on the pretty English girl, when hers was

fixed on the fire, and he came to the silent conclusion, that he had never seen so modest and gentle a countenance. He was almost sorry when Mrs. Hardy's return broke the repose of the party, and the appearance of candles dispelled the soft gloom in which he had hitherto beheld the fair stranger. The housekeeper uttered loud exclamations at the darkness in which she found them, and wondered Mr. Findelkind had not rung for lights; he excused himself by saying, that he had waited "Madame Dabney's" pleasure, being quite satisfied to sit by firelight himself. And then came a request from Mrs. Hardy, that Mr. Findelkind would oblige them "just with one little song, whilst the family were at dinner." He was to sing to his patron's guests that evening. The request was complied with; the Tyrolese song one of his sweetest and wildest national airs, and even Mrs. Dabney's countenance relaxed, as the notes of piercing and tender sweetness stole on her ear. Audrey had never heard such a voice or such singing before; and it completely over-

powered her. Tears of delight filled her eyes, and she alone did not thank him, (for she could not) when the song ceased. But he was more flattered by her emotion and silence than he would have been by words; unasked and with a smiling glance at her, as if to tell her that *this* song was for her especial ear, he warbled again a *Minnelied*, to which he gave a more perfect expression than to its predecessor. As the airy notes of liquid sweetness died away, Mrs. Hardy burst forth with rapturous expression of admiration; she had, she said, often heard Mr. Findelkind before, but never that song, nor any half as pretty, and she advised him to sing it to the company by and by, who would, she averred, be charmed with it. He smiled, as he answered that he had fancied it too simple to be liked by people generally; it was an old love song of his native mountains, but he would take her advice and try it.

## CHAPTER VII.

In the dining-room of Crowhurst Park, a large and fashionable party were assembled; the baronet and his daughter, who had (as we have seen) been long abroad, were entertaining a household of country neighbours and other acquaintances. Rank and beauty surrounded the hospitable board, but pre-eminent, even amidst that distinguished looking assemblage, were the beauty and bearing of the host and young hostess of the feast.

The father and daughter greatly resembled each other; and from the appearance of youth which the baronet still retained, might rather

have been taken for brother and sister than parent and child. Sir Philip's countenance bore, perhaps, a finer expression than his daughter's; and Helen's features were more regularly beautiful than his; but the likeness between them was almost startling. Sir Philip was talking to the lady whom he had taken in to dinner.

"You will hear him to-night," he said, "and I think you will allow that his voice is unequalled."

"And is it quite uncultivated," asked the lady, who was a musician of some attainment.

"No, I took him to Italy with us, and gave him the best possible instruction for a short time, both in music, and in everything which would tend to the development of his taste in the art. I thought it the best way of endeavouring to show my gratitude for the inestimable benefit he had bestowed on me, in saving Helen's life."

"Oh, true: Miss Beaumont was telling me before dinner of her escape. It quite made me giddy to think of the frightful precipice beneath



her. What you must have suffered, I can conceive, at beholding her in such peril and being unable to help her. But those mountaineers think nothing of precipices; they are so used to them."

"Findelkind, nevertheless, was the only mountaineer who would attempt her rescue from the tottering mass of rock on which she stood, and he effected it at the peril of his own life."

"You should have the scene painted, Sir Philip," said a young man, seated at his left hand, "it would make a splendid picture, and be a portrait of Miss Beaumont at the same time."

"I fear Miss Beaumont might object to it, on the plea, that terror is not the most becoming expression for a lady's face to carry down to posterity; but I will ask her."

"I cannot imagine Miss Beaumont looking frightened."

"Nevertheless she did, and clung to the bold peasant who rescued her, with truly feminine alarm. And, indeed, she was snatched

from a death peculiarly terrible to her imagination."

"Is the peasant handsome?" asked the lady.

"Remarkably so; the Tyrolese peasantry are quite nature's aristocracy; a very fine people, brave and handsome, and the best marksmen with the rifle in the world."

"Ay," said the gentleman on the left, "I should like to have a shooting match with your *protégé*. You know I pique myself on a little skill in that way."

"Findelkind will very readily accept your challenge, I dare say."

"Really he is quite a valuable acquisition to a country circle," said the lady, laughing, "with his voice and rifle, you will find him a treasure for amusing your guests."

Sir Philip smiled assent, and the conversation then turned on subjects foreign to the purport of our story.

Findelkind sang that evening to the brilliant circle Sir Philip had gathered round him, with

He travelled with his patron to Italy and Germany, dwelling for rather more than a year in each of those lands, and Sir Philip spared no expense in educating his daughter's young preserver. The industry and ability of Findelkind well rewarded the baronet's judicious provision for his instruction. The time was short, and the period of the student's life late for an education to be begun, and in a certain degree finished; but the quick senses of the Tyrolese made an hour of sight or hearing, convey the ordinary teaching of months.

It is true he did not go through the ordinary routine of instruction; but he did wonders. He learned Italian tolerably, English well, and French a little better, whilst he mastered music as a science, and gave a portion of every day to the cultivation of his voice. He read much also, and as his mind expanded, and he gained ideas as well as impressions, his musical compositions took a higher tone; the difference reminding Helen (as she once said) "of Undine before and after she possessed a soul."

But if Findelkind's talents won the Beaumonts' admiration, his simplicity and goodness still more powerfully engaged their respect and affection. A deep and fervent piety is one of the characteristics of the Tyrolese, and the musician could scarcely fail of possessing it in some degree from his early training, and from the enthusiastic nature of his mind. This faith which was simple, humble, and loving in him, preserved him from the danger of such a violent and sudden change as he experienced, in passing from an Alpine solitude to crowded and luxurious cities ; from a home of poverty, to one of wealth and splendour ; from the fellowship of a pious and believing peasantry, to the mixed society of the world.

Sir Philip was especially pleased with the humility of the young man, under all the commendation his musical skill elicited, as well as at his modest reserve ; and he suffered Findelkind consequently to be more with himself and his daughter whilst they were on the continent, than he would otherwise have permitted.

Travelling tends very much to levelling the

more than his usual power and brilliancy. He tried, as he had said he would, the “Minnelied,” and suffering his thoughts to return to the young occupant of the housekeeper’s room, gave it a tenderness of expression that procured it an unanimous encore. Every body pronounced the music of the Tyrol unrivalled and the singer a marvellous performer; and Helen approaching a few minutes after he had ceased, paused by the piano, and said in German, “Herr Findelkind, you have surpassed yourself this evening. You must teach me that song, at your earliest leisure.”

“Mademoiselle may command my services whenever she pleases,” was the reply; “and the song would better suit her voice than it does mine.”

“Nay, that is impossible,” she said with some animation, and moving past him, she was soon engaged in listening to the praises her guests lavished on Sir Philip’s gifted *protégé*.

Findelkind was, in fact, no common minstrel; he possessed genius as well as vocal power.

Brought up amidst the sublime poetry of nature—nurtured on her mountain throne—his crad'le rocked, as it were, by the mighty winds that bowed the thick pine forests, and swept the glittering avalanche from its eiry—he had drank in the inspiration that makes poets and heroes; being deprived of the impetus received from other minds—for he had no books—and living just as the glorious struggle for his country's freedom was over, his enthusiasm found vent in music; in which, as well as in the first rudiments of education, he received some assistance from the good curé of his parish. From the first moment that he heard the Tyrolese sing, the English baronet was conscious that a great musician stood before him, and, as we have seen, his gratitude offered the young man the means of cultivating his talent. Findelkind yearning to know more of the world and to hear the music of Italy, of which, marvellous reports had reached his ears, even in his distant home, thankfully accepted the wealthy Englishman's offer.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“AUDREY,” said Miss Beaumont, as the young girl was assisting at her morning toilette, “Audrey, do you like music?”

“Very much, madam.”

“Well then you may bring your work at twelve o’clock to my boudoir. I am going to learn a song from Herr Findelkind, and you may hear it, if you like. And thus also,” with a slight laugh, “I shall secure the propriety of a duenna—do you know what duenna means?—though she be but young.”

Audrey was delighted at this permission, and punctually as mid-day struck on the great clock in the stable yard, she entered the heiress’s



boudoir. Miss Beaumont was alone, and seated in an easy chair near the window, gazing out on the noble chase which lay beneath it. At Audrey's entrance she turned her head.

"Oh! you are come," she said languidly, "well sit down by that table; Herr Findelkind will be later than I thought, as he is shooting with the gentlemen in the chase."

Audrey took the seat assigned her, and a long silence followed. For some time Miss Beaumont's eyes continued fixed on the chase; but at length they wandered in the direction of her new attendant. Audrey looked very pretty as she sat there at work; her little round figure was neatly attired in a delicate pink cotton print, and her soft silky hair closely braided back from her forehead, revealed the shape of a well-formed head, and a fair pure brow with pencilled lines of eyebrows. There was an air and expression of innocence and repose over the whole person of the country girl, which struck the artist-eye of the accomplished Miss Beaumont.

conventional forms and distinctions of rank, and by the time they reached England, the peasant of the Tyrol was looked upon by the baronet and his daughter quite as a humble friend ; though, be it observed, these proud Beaumonts would never have entirely forgotten that he was not of their *caste*, even if he had been a Mozart or Handel. And Findelkind, who had his pride also, though it was not quite that of the ordinary world, preferred living apart from those who did not esteem him their equal, and contentedly, and by his own wish (even when Sir Philip would fain have lionised him), took his meals with the upper servants, and passed his days in his own room.

Thus on this his most successful evening, he did not stay, as he might have done, to partake of the refreshments offered to the guests before retiring for the night, but stole away to take a biscuit or a sandwich quietly in the housekeeper's room, and to get one more glance at the pretty English peasant girl, who did not, however,

tarry long after his return ; Miss Beaumont's bell shortly after summoning Audrey to her room.

Helen was not disposed to talk then ; she looked thoughtful and a little tired, Audrey fancied, and never spoke to her attendant whilst she unbraided her long tresses ; but hummed all the time, in a sweet low murmur, the " Minnelied " that Findelkind had sung. No wonder Audrey heard the sweet and tender air in her sleep that night.

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“Audrey,” she said, “you appear to work quickly and skilfully ; have you been brought up to your aunt’s business : are you a dress maker ?”

“No, madam ; I have done nothing yet but keep my uncle’s house.”

“And who is your uncle ?”

“The sexton of Charliewood Church, ma’am ?”

“Indeed, have you no parents ?”

“No, ma’am, my uncle and my dear aunt Kate were as a father and mother to me, from my birth.”

Audrey’s eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

“Your aunt Kate ; Miss Skrimpton’s predecessor, I suppose ?”

Audrey answered in the affirmative.

“I remember, now ; Hardy told me that her niece had married a widower, and that it was a very good match for her. Tell me all about yourself, Audrey ; what your home is like, and the manner of your living ; in short, to beguile this very dull tedious hour, tell me your history.”

Audrey smiled archly, as she replied “Ah,

madam, you will find little to amuse you, in 'the short and simple annals of the poor.' "

"How ! a quotation from Gray, and in such a pure accent too. Child, are you a *bas bleu*, or a princess in disguise ? " said Miss Beaumont, with a slight tinge of satire in her tone.

Audrey coloured as she answered innocently.

"I don't know what a *bas bleu*," hesitating over the words, "is, ma'am, but I see you are pleased to jest with me. I am a poor country girl and nothing more, though, from the kindness of our Rector and his wife, who is my godmother, I have been a little better taught than the other village girls."

"And you like to show your acquirements, eh !"

Audrey's blush grew still deeper. "I was very foolish to repeat that line" she said, "but indeed, ma'am, I did not do so from vanity. It came suddenly into my head, and I said it without thinking."

"Well, I believe you," said Miss Beaumont graciously—"Now for your history."

“ I have now Madam, but if it will amuse you to hear me talk, I will tell you what my home is like, and how poor folks live.”

And Audrey in brief and simple phrase, described Jonathan's cottage and their daily mode of living ; and the Church and the good Rector and his wife, and drew such a clear and pretty picture of country life and manners that her auditor was quite interested.

“ How happy you must be,” she said, as the girl paused, “ I had no idea the English peasantry were so comfortable and contented, I had always heard they were a grumbling, dissatisfied people, wanting to be all masters, and fancying themselves as wise as their teachers, for I have been brought up abroad, and know but little of my own country people you see.”

“ We have a few discontented people amongst us,” said Audrey, “ but they are mostly strangers from the great towns ; and nobody heeds them much.”

“ I am glad to hear it. I hope all England


may resemble this said Charliewood ; it puts me in mind (in your description) of the valleys of the Tyrol, whose inhabitants appear to me as much above the ordinary run of mankind, as their dwellings are exalted above the houses of the plains. But here comes Herr Findelkind ; now you shall hear music which will give you greater pleasure than I at first thought it would, if I am not mistaken.”

Helen Beaumont was, as she had said, almost a stranger in her own land. Sir Philip unable to bear his home after the death of his idolised wife, had carried his infant daughter abroad with him, and they had returned to England only once before, for a few months, during the long interval of twenty years. Whilst she was very young she had been committed to the care of an excellent Swiss governess, a woman of fervent piety and great intelligence, for Sir Phillip disdained an ordinary *bonne* for his motherless infant, and whilst Mademoiselle Bournan continued with her, and even long after she had



left her charge, the little Helen was remarkable for her infantine goodness. Her father, a high minded and honorable gentleman, but nevertheless, a mere man of the world—began to fear that his young daughters singular sentiments (as he termed them) would end in fanaticism, and he did not therefore experience much regret, when the admirable Swiss left them to wed a good *Pasteur* to whom she had been long affianced. Nay, he purposely supplied her place with a woman, whose opinions and principles were not quite so exalted and beyond his power of appreciation. Helen had many succeeding governesses German, Italian, or Swiss—for her father, who was fond of study, and a man of great ability undertook her English education himself—and they were all carefully chosen, and women of undoubted ability. But, alas ! amongst such a variety what accordance of principle could be found ? or how could they be expected to be other than a mixture of good and bad people—and there was no mother's eye to watch over and detect the

slightest latent evil ; to check, restrain, or guide her daughter's teachers as well as the child herself. Very sad is the fate of a woman who is left early motherless. The loss can never be fully supplied even by the best of fathers ; and though Sir Philip might fairly have aspired to the title of the kindest of parents, he scarcely merited that of the best. He was not a religious man, but a moral one ; and though he professed the faith of the Church of England, he cared so little about its doctrines, that he trusted his Helen indifferently to Romanists, Lutherans, Genevese Calvinists, or even people who professed a universal toleration, which may be interpreted into a universal indifference to religion itself. She was exposed moreover by this mode of education to the chance of imbibing all the faults and prejudices peculiar to different races and nations, and the feminine influence by which such might be conveyed, was but ill counterbalanced by her daily association of two or three hours with her father. Happily for Helen, however, she



had loved her first instructress as she would a mother, and the memory of the gentle Swiss, and of her own peculiarly pious childhood, came often back as holy charms to avert much of the evil that haunted her youth.

As she grew up, her father made her more his companion than she had been ; and the resemblance of their characters, and the comparative youth of Sir Philip, caused their relationship to assume rather the form of a fraternal intimacy and friendship, than the command and obedience natural between father and daughter. Helen was a fearless horsewoman, played billiards and chess admirably, could read Greek and Latin with him, and converse on nearly any subject he chose ; and the baronet proud of her intellect and grace and vivacity, did not regret that her mind had rather too masculine a cast, and that she was a little too self reliant for a very young woman. But we have wandered far and long from the boudoir, in which Audrey is seated listening to the music lesson ; let us return thither.

Findelkind entered it looking flushed and a little excited.

“Your pardon Fraulein,” he said, in German to Miss Beaumont, “your pardon for my long delay; but Sir Philip kept me shooting at a mark till some five minutes ago.”

“And, of course, you put our English marksmen to shame, Findelkind.”

“Nay,” he said, smiling, “they are almost as skilful as the Tyrolese; if they used our rifle they would far surpass me.”

“Your rifle! an awkward clumsy affair not to be compared with ours; that is quite absurd, Findelkind. But you did beat them, did you not?”

The Tyrolese answered in the affirmative, and Miss Beaumont with an expression of pleasure and exultation on her fine features, opened the piano, and prepared to learn the desired song.

She had a very fine contralto voice, and a quick ear, and re-echoed every sound of Findelkind's voice with wonderful precision and power.

Audrey never had been so charmed; she sat drinking in the delicious music, her work resting unheeded on her lap, and her soft blue eyes, which, so to speak, reflected the liquid melody, fixed earnestly on the singers. At length Miss Beaumont ventured to sing alone, the unwritten song she had been learning; (It was her whim *thus* to acquire the Tyrolese melodies which Findelkind could and would fain have committed to paper for her,) and her teacher, with a compliment to her memory and ready ear, pronounced it perfect.

“I have,” he continued, still speaking German, “I have another of these simple songs of our people, which quite equals or even surpasses this one, but it is for three voices; would you like me to transcribe it, in order that some one of your lady guests, who is a musician, may take the soprano portion of it?”

Helen hesitated.

“It is a foolish fancy, perhaps,” she said, after that momentary pause, “but I should not like to hear these peculiar and little known

melodies hackneyed, sung badly, with all the airs and graces, and foolish *floriture* of an overtaught, but music-less young lady. There is really no one here to whom I would entrust them ; let my fair guests keep to their laboured bravura and let us for the sake of the dear Tyrol preserve her airs from desecration. Nevertheless, I should like to hear your trio. Does the soprano part require much skill ?”

“ No, lady, or it would not be a common *jödeln* of the mountain shepherds and dairy-maids. All that is required is a sweet, clear, high voice.”

“ Methinks I can fit you with the same,” said Helen, and turning to Audrey, she asked in English,

“ Can you sing at all, Audrey.”

“ I try to sing sometimes ma’am” was the blushing reply.

“ Ay ? well now let us hear a ballad of the English peasantry, that we may compare it with those of the Tyrol.”



“Indeed, Miss Beaumont, you could not judge of it, from my singing.”

“We will hear; come you look a sensible girl, modest enough to be content with doing your best; sing, and oblige me by so doing.”

There was a gracious kindness in Helen's manner which her young attendant could not resist; she saw Miss Beaumont really wished her to sing, and though the compliance pained her shyness, she obeyed. The ballad she chose was Kathleen O'More, for though she knew all the old Psalm tunes perfectly, her *repertoire* of songs was very limited. As Helen listened she turned a delighted glance on Findelkind, which he returned. Indeed he was more than pleased, he was touched by the plaintive tenderness of the ballad; it spoke to every good and kindly feeling he possessed, and ere Audrey's song was ended the eye of the Tyrolese peasant was dimmed with tears.

“I was sure of it,” exclaimed Helen, as she



ceased, "I knew by her speaking that she had a soprano voice ; you could teach her the part-song, Findelkind ? "

"If she will let me, madam," said the young man, pleased with the designed task.

"She will, I am certain, to please me ; she is such an obliging little creature. With all Julie's cleverness she quite rivals her in my good graces."

And she explained to Audrey her wish that Herr Findelkind should teach her part of a Tyrolese song to be sung with them.

"I am not going to ask you to perform before anyone but myself," she added, "and it is merely that I may have the gratification of hearing a beautiful piece of music."

Helen said this, because she feared Audrey—who had, in her opinion, been very improperly educated for her station—should presume on such a distinction as singing with herself. The girl gave a simple and quiet assent. "If Miss

Beaumont pleased, she would try." But she felt a little afraid in her heart, lest she should be stupid, and the wonderful Findelkind should scorn her.

"Very well," said Helen, "and now, as it must be just luncheon time, and hospitality compels me to go and entertain others instead of myself, I will leave you to learn your part at this piano."

And as propriety, in the shape of a third person is not deemed essential in the case of a peasant girl, Audrey and Findelkind remained alone, engaged at their task (a pleasant one to both in some respects), till Mrs. Hardy, amazed at their non-appearance at dinner, came to seek the temporary *femme de chambre*, and found her neither stitching nor waiting on her lady (who in truth, was at luncheon), but singing German *patois* with the Tyrolese. The housekeeper's amazement was extreme.

"Ours is the strangest young lady," she said that evening, confidentially to Mrs. Dabney. "The very strangest! She's so wonderfully

proud and haughty in her manner, even to the noblest in the land; yet she goes and does things that young ladies of not half her pretensions would do; nay, that they'd scorn; for though Audrey *do*, in a manner belong to me, and I know the family have a great respect for *me*, still it is a demeaning of herself, for Miss Beaumont to be singing with her own maid and a wandering fiddler like, who lives at the second table; when there are ever so many ladies too in the house who can sing so loud, you may a'most hear 'em here. I can't say as I approve of it." And she shook her head ominously.

"Nor I neither, aunt," said Mrs. Dabney, pricking her work spitefully, "she will turn that girl's head with her nonsensical folly; she is bad enough now to manage, and when we get 'ome, the 'ouse wont 'old her. I shall send her back to Jonathan if this goes on."

"Dear! and she looks such a simple, pretty behaved lass," exclaimed the housekeeper, "I couldn't have believed she would have given you trouble."

“ Ah !” sighed Mrs. Dabney, emphatically, pricking her work still more pitilessly. “ Ah !”

“ Well to be sure, and she to get so into favour with my young lady—the deceitful smooth-faced thing. But I shall let Miss Beaumont know what sort of a temper she is, and Mr. Findelkind too, for he is a sweet young man, look you ; and I would not have him be taken in by a pretty face.”

“ Why, sure, you don’t think he would take a fancy to her,” said Mrs. Dabney, scornfully.

“ To be sure he ought to know better,” replied the buxom housekeeper, smoothing her bands of false hair ; “ but youth is youth, and she has a sly little way of getting over people, or she would not have won upon my proud young lady at this rate. To sing with her, and all ‘ hail fellow well met,’ as the saying is ; when she never so much as says to me, ‘ Mrs. Hardy, sit down a bit, whilst I tell you what I wish done.’ Oh, its quite awful !”

Mrs. Dabney fully concurred in her kins-

woman's indignation at Audrey's undue exaltation, and thus Miss Beaumont, by the unrestrained gratification of her whims, succeeded in making two jealous enemies for her poor favourite.

The girl was ignorant of the offence she had innocently given ; and did not observe the slight change in Mrs. Hardy's manner, which followed the conversation we have recorded. She was too much accustomed by this time to her aunt's temper to heed *its* extra bitterness, and was moreover, so delighted at the condescending intercourse with which the charming Helen indulged her, and with the pleasant and kind teaching of Herr Findelkind, that she was inclined to see all things through a rosy haze.

She grew daily prettier, and her manner acquired a certain grace ; for women are very imitative in early youth, and easily take the tone and style of their associates. Nowhere could she have found a better or more perfect model than Helen ; and fascinated by so much beauty,

## CHAPTER IX.

HELEN Beaumont's love for music approached to what is called a mania, and her pleasure when Audrey sang the mountain glee, with her and Findelkind, had been so great, that she could have embraced her young attendant in the excess of her delight.

“You must teach her some more of these ethereal lays, which sound to me like the sighing of the winds trained into harmony, Findelkind,” she said. “The girl has talent for anything.”

This praise was uttered in the Tyrolese's own tongue.

“She has a fine voice, and a quick ear,” was

the reply ; “ but she pronounces the words barbarously, and the expression, which was the great charm of her English ballad, is wanting.”

“ You are difficult to please, Master Musician,” replied the lady, smiling ; “ but the faults you complain of, may be easily remedied ; give her a little more time and attention, translate the words, and thus let her know their meaning, and she will give them expression enough, believe me.”

And Audrey was forthwith taught that the glee was supposed to be sung by a happy shepherdess, her jealous rival, and the shepherd beloved by both, and the words were interpreted to her ; first, literally, by Findelkind, and afterwards, more intelligibly, by Miss Beaumont, who had not herself before completely understood the *patois* in which she had been singing. The necessity of making Audrey comprehend what she sang, suggested to the young lady the idea of employing the rare voice which she found at her disposal in executing with herself and the Tyrolese, those fine old glees and madrigals, in her own



talent and graciousness, the country girl formed for the young lady one of those passionate and devoted attachments which almost equal, in their intensity, the love of more mature womanhood. She thought of Helen by day, dreamed of her by night, and never kneeled in prayer without making supplication for one who, alas ! seldom prayed for herself.

Never had Miss Beaumont been so well attended as she was by her young admirer, whose simple and sincere devotion to her she had talent to detect, and heart enough to prize. She read in Audrey's expressive face the delight with which every service was rendered ; the pride she took in adorning her lady's peerless beauty ; the gratitude a little word of kindness would inspire, and she insisted (even angrily) when Mrs. Dabney would have returned with her niece to Charliewood, that the housekeeper should retain Audrey at least, till her own maid's return. Very unwillingly the concession was made ; but it *was* made, for Mrs. Dabney did not like to

offend the “great Miss Beaumont,” and her compliance was rewarded so munificently that her gratified avarice almost mastered her jealousy; and she talked Jonathan over to consent to Audrey’s prolonged absence, and consoled her own secret mortification, by telling her village gossips that it was at *her* request, and through *her* influence, that Audrey was left at Crowhurst Park to wait upon the heiress.

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and to combat with the difficulties of the world. To be sure it was partly to make his mother's age more comfortable that Findelkind had left *his* native land; and she honoured him for the filial love which had thus for a time banished him. Pitying the heart-loneliness of the stranger in a foreign country, which, even amidst the luxury and kindness that surrounded him, her quick feeling discovered (and of which, by the way, we would observe, his noble patrons never dreamed), Audrey treated him with a tenderness and sympathy that won his confidence, and gave him that feeling of home-reliance and domestic intimacy which he had lacked ever since he had left the Tyrol. The simple goodness of his true and loyal nature was, as it were, reflected back from hers; he felt that his spirit could repose on Audrey's, that she could best understand him, and feel for him. It was thus he had leaned upon his mother's heart; *there* made the likeness of which he spoke, between the old Tyrolese matron and the young English maiden.

And thus love stole upon him softly, and unmarked, as twilight steals over day, or manhood on the morning of our years.

Helen was at length released from the duties of hostess by the departure of her guests, and then Audrey ceased receiving Findelkind's instructions. Indeed, from that time he seldom saw her alone. Miss Beaumont was satisfied with the number of glees her favourite had acquired, and did not wish her to be taught more, and when they met in the housekeeper's room Mrs. Hardy or the butler were always present. It was the impatience of the restraint thus placed on their confidential intercourse, and the pain this almost separation gave him, that revealed to the Tyrolese the nature of his sentiments with regard to Audrey, he

“ Grew acquainted with his heart, and searched  
What stirr'd it so. Alas, he ‘found it love.’ ”

The same circumstances forced no such conviction on the mind of Audrey. In fact, she scarcely missed Findelkind in the more frequent

language, of which she had often talked to Findelkind. She proposed that he should teach them to Audrey, and the proposal was, of course a command. Every day, henceforward, the young man gave a lesson to the peasant girl in Miss Beaumont's boudoir. He did not exactly teach her music, nor even exercise her voice in scales or intervals—such was not the wish of his patroness—he merely played her part to her, till her ear caught the air, and her voice could echo it. It was her turn then to perfect his pronunciation of the English words. These lessons grew daily longer. Helen, occupied with her guests, left them undisturbed possession of her boudoir every afternoon, and Findelkind, interested in his task, and attracted by the simplicity and gentleness of his pupil, lingered as long as he well might at the piano. By degrees they not only sang, but chatted together.

The Tyrolese told the young girl that she put him in mind of his mother; and Audrey felt pleased when he told her so; and asked many

questions touching the family and home and country of her teacher. It was surprising what a graphic picture he drew of the latter, in his broken English ; but words have a strange power on the lips of a man of genius ; a few well and nervously employed sentences will tell a tale, that the endless babble of mediocrity does but embarrass and confuse.

Audrey soon knew all about the 'Tyrol ; her lively fancy painted, from his brief hints, the mountain solitude of eternal snow—the dark pine forests—the swollen torrent—the avalanche—the road-side record of the dead traveller, or the merry village festival—the return of the flocks from the Alpine pastures—the rifle shooting, and the wild music of the hills.

She felt quite intimately acquainted also with the good *frau*, who dwelt in that valley of the Arlberg, and who was so pious and kind, and loving ; and she pitied Findelkind that he had been obliged to leave his humble, peaceful home, and wondered that men should so like to wander

presence of her beloved Miss Beaumont, who, knowing that the girl's stay was drawing to a close, indulged her by allowing her to be a good deal with her, and by chatting to her kindly and familiarly. And thus Helen learned all that concerned the ordinary life of her attendant, which the girl had not thought of relating as "her history" when Miss Beaumont required it. John Page, of course, figured prominently in the scene, and Helen once, laughingly, assured Audrey that, if ever she came to Charliewood, she would decidedly call on her favourite Corydon.

As we have seen Mrs. Hardy was greatly scandalised at Miss Beaumont's condescension, nor did the Tyrolese's admiration of Audrey, (which, though he carefully concealed it, her feminine instinct had detected) tend to soften the angry and jealous feelings with which she regarded the sexton's niece. For the housekeeper had felt the singular charm of the young man's character, as well as his good looks, and would have been nothing loth to bestow herself and her comfortable



savings on the lucky Findelkind, had he chosen to avail himself of her favour. His modesty, however, rendered him unable to interpret aright her manifestations of it; though he was grateful for her kindness, which impressed him with the natural conviction that she was a good-natured and warm-hearted woman. He liked and respected her, and was, therefore, sincerely distressed when on entering her room, the day following the return of Miss Beaumont's French maid, he found her in tears.

“Madame Hardy, wherefore do you cry?” he asked, in his childish sounding English, “what harm has come to you?”

“Ah, Mr. Findelkind, I am so vexed, so very, very unhappy!” sobbed the dame passionately, “to think of a person like me being so used and for a chit like that!”

And she sobbed afresh—Findelkind repeated his attempts at consolation, and his questions as to the cause of his friends grief. Mrs. Hardy at last found sufficient composure to answer him.

“I do hate to be imposed upon, Mr. Findel-

kind" she said—"Now would you not have said that Audrey Dabney, was a good, honest girl?"

"Assuredly," said the Tyrolese colouring deeply.

"And as good tempered a lass, as you could meet?"

Findelkind again assented.

"Then let me tell you, monseer, that you and I were both mistaken. She is as false and deceitful as she can be. I knew to be sure from my niece, that all was not gold that glittered, and that Miss had a temper of her own, and would sulk and pout, and be as obstinate as a mule; but I thought 'come we all have our tempers,' and so I took no heed to what Annette said. I saw too, she flattered up Miss Beaumont and quite made a fool of her, but *that* too was no concern of mine, But now—now—"

Mrs. Hardy paused, quite breathless. "What worse thing do you charge her with?" asked Findelkind almost sternly.

"She has been speaking against me and

against my niece to Miss Beaumont and my young lady has spoken to me in a way she never did before."

The Tyrolese looked both shocked and pained.

"Are you not mistaken? should it not be some error, my good lady," he said, "I cannot think it true."

"True? it's true enough as I know to my cost! Miss Beaumont let out all the girl had said to her—but I don't care, for now Julie's come back, my young madam will have to go home, and I will take care she never darkens these doors again."

"Is Audrey going?" asked Findelkind startled at the intelligence.

"Yes, to be sure she is, and glad enough I shall be!"

"But have you told her what Miss Beaumont has said? Have you given her the opportunity for justifying herself?" asked the young man, distracted between grief at Audrey's departure and dismay at the charge made against her.

“ *I* tell her ! no, indeed ; *of course* she would deny it ; and how could I doubt Miss Beaumont’s word ? Such a high spirited honourable young lady as she is.”

Findelkind secretly resolved to ask Audrey about it himself, and said no more to Mrs. Hardy on the subject, save offering her such consolation as he could, consistently with his doubts in favour of the accused.

The truth of the matter was, that Mrs. Hardy had urged Audrey’s departure on Helen more strenuously than was agreeable to the haughty young lady, who had silenced her ; telling her “ that *very* disagreeable Mrs. Dabney must wait her pleasure.” This unfortunate epithet, which owed its origin to Miss Beaumont’s own opinion of the individual named, convinced Mrs. Hardy that Audrey had been speaking against her new aunt ; and the rebuff given to herself was a plain proof—to her mind—that the girl had done the same evil office on *her* behalf. This was the sole ground of an accusation which it would have

puzzled Audrey to understand or to explain had Findelkind mentioned the subject to her. But he did not. Our excellent Tyrolese was not faultless; his disposition was tainted with jealousy in a slight degree, and he had a great distrust of his own judgment, as well as of his own merits. In his intercourse with artificial society he had several times been deceived already, and it had rendered him suspicious of a world differing so greatly from the simple people of his own land. With this tendency to distrust, he thought over Mrs. Hardy's complaints.

“ One doth not know  
How much an ill word may empoison liking.”

It occurred to Findelkind, that in truth he knew little of Audrey; if she were cunning enough to disguise a bad temper beneath those rosy smiles of hers, she might be equally capable of pretending to sentiments and feelings which were not her own. Mrs. Hardy could have no malicious reason for bringing a false accusation

against one actually connected with herself, and she could have no other motive to be angry than the one she had assigned. Thus we all foolishly judge about people's reasons and motives, as if we held the key of their thoughts, and were cognisant of that strange jumble of kindness and caprice, generosity and jealousy, which forms a human heart. Influenced by these doubts, Findelkind resolved to remain passive in the matter; and likewise to delay, at least, the declaration of his affection for her, which he had resolved to make to Audrey before she left Crowhurst. Above all things he valued candour and simple-mindedness, nor was he insensible to the beauty, grace and comfort of a good and gentle temper. He knew well the home-blessing that it was; and he had resolved that he would never bring a woman to his humble hearth, who would be likely to mar his mother's quiet enjoyment of it. And believing the poor girl ill-humoured and spiteful, he struggled to forget her mere external attractions.

Meantime Audrey was grieving over the necessity of leaving Miss Beaumont ; Jonathan had written to say that he should be glad to have her home again, and she felt that her promise to her dead aunt, bound her to a ready obedience. There was no longer either any plea for Helen to detain her ; since her own maid had at last returned from a long holiday spent with her family ; and though Miss Beaumont was pleased with the girl's affection, she did not return it with more than an approving liking—Audrey was therefore permitted to depart. Before she left the Manor, however, Helen had a long, kind chat with her ; directed the girl to write to her if she were in any trouble or difficulty, or if she wanted a place, and finally presented her with five pounds and a handsome little gold watch. Audrey wept a great deal at parting from her young patroness, and in the pain of the moment did not notice the agitated, though cold, farewell from Findelkind, that followed it, or the ill-concealed pleasure with which Mrs. Hardy bade her good-bye.



She looked back with affection and regret at the noble manor-house, as the dog cart rattled down the avenue. After spending six happy weeks within it, amidst all that could please her fancy and her taste, she was about to return to her lonely home and the daily drudgery of household cares. But it was not on account of this coming change, nor for the luxury and liberty of Crowhurst that she grieved. It was the loss of her privileged association with such people as Miss Beaumont and Findelkind that she wept; could they have been with her, the sexton's cottage would have been as loved a home.

Jonathan welcomed her back with a sort of surly satisfaction; his habitual affection still wrestling with the prejudices constantly instilled into his mind by his wife; and Mrs. Dabney received her with a sharp reproof for staying away so long.

Audrey would fain have had her uncle accept the wages of her brief servitude; but the sexton sturdily refused—"It should," he said, "be put

into the Savings' bank for her; the day might come that she would need it."

Audrey begged a few shillings from it, however, when she learned its intended destination, in order that she might give a book to John Page. To this Jonathan consented, in spite of the tart objections made against it by his wife; and it was agreed that Mr. M'Coy should be requested to purchase a volume, fit for, and likely please Johnnie. Until she had obtained it, Audrey refrained from visiting her old companion.

## CHAPTER X.

A WEARY time had the period of Audrey's absence been for the poor cripple. Till then he never knew how entirely he loved her; how necessary her presence and her conversation had become to him; how her visits had brightened and cheered the dull monotony of his life. When he heard of her return, he counted the hours till she should come to see him; every approaching footfall up the little garden-path made his heart beat, and every fresh disappointment of beholding another's face, not hers, fell more heavily on his spirits. If Audrey had known of that hope deferred, she would not have waited for the slow arrival of her gift, but would have flown with her

old speed to the Pages' cottage. It came, at last, however, and with her pretty book in her hand she set forth to visit her old playfellow and companion, her face wearing the first bright smile it had borne since her return to Charlie-wood. It was almost two months since she had trod that old familiar way, and great changes had come to pass since then in the face of nature. The trees were nearly leafless. Some few only retained a scattered remnant of golden foliage; the greater part exhibited a clear delicate tracery of countless branches and fibres against the frosty blue sky. Their glories were literally laid in the dust, and Audrey, who had a childish liking for hearing the crisp dead leaves crackle beneath her tread, ran lightly over the thick bed of them that strewn the road. The same fancy betrayed her approach to John Page, when she entered the little garden.

“Here is Audrey at last,” he said to his grandmother, “I hear her step amongst the dead leaves. She has been long coming.”

Dame Page thought so too, and did not give her old pupil so warm a welcome as was her wont. The dame was sitting knitting beside the hearth, opposite to Johnnie's couch when Audrey lifted the latch (after tapping lightly), and showed her sweet face at the open door. The school-mistress merely looked up from her knitting for a moment, nodded and said coldly—

“Is it you, Audrey? So you're come at last.”

“Yes, at last, dear dame,” said the girl, gliding into the room, and pressing her lips on the old woman's cheek, “I should have been here long ago, but that I wished to make my visit more welcome to Johnnie, by showing him I had not forgotten him;” and turning to her friend she warmly pressed the hand he extended, and placed her gift in it.

“Ah, Audrey, dear,” he said tenderly, “I wanted no gift to make your presence welcome. If you knew how I have longed to see you.”

“And I dare say you have been accusing me of ungratefully forgetting my best friend?”

“No,” he replied; “I could not doubt your kind heart, Audrey if I would; I think I should disbelieve my own senses, if they accused you of doing wrong. But what a beautiful gift you have brought me. Look, Granny, here is elegant binding, violet and gold, and such beautiful pictures.”

The dame hobbled over to her grandson's side, and, quite propitiated by the attention to her darling, joined her thanks to his, and embraced the donor.

Audrey, quite at her ease now, took her old place beside John Page, and was soon cheerily relating all that had passed since they last met. The grandeur of Crowhurst sparkled, in her rapid and merry relation, with all the splendour of Aladdin's palace; and Miss Beaumont's beauty and kindness were equally, though unintentionally, exaggerated by the ardent and fanciful girl. Findelkind's singing, and his adventures, and all he had told her of his country were not forgotten either; it was quite wonderful how Audrey chat-

tered away in the fire-light ; her cheek flushing and her eyes sparkling, as the dancing flame quivered over her countenance. And Johnnie lay in a happy trance of pleasure, gazing on her beloved face and hearing her clear voice in his inmost soul ; whilst old Dame Page hushed the clatter of her knitting pins to listen, eager to learn all about the grand Beaumonts, that she might in her turn retail the story to her gossips. A happier fireside group never met together.

“ What a strange name Findelkind is,” said John Page : “ it sounds just like the name of a fairy prince, does it not, Audrey ? ” It is quite a name I can’t forget ; it is so whimsical and singular. What is his christian name, if he have one ? ”

“ Oh,” laughed Audrey, “ he is a mere mortal I assure you, and had godfathers and godmothers, who called him Basil.”

“ Well, I shall always call him prince Fin-



delkind," said John, "and shall expect to hear his marvellous adventures some day. I hope you have not fallen in love with him, Audrey?"

There was a slight tremulousness in the tone of this affected jest.

"I! what nonsense!" exclaimed Audrey, blushing and smiling, "as if he would think of a poor girl like me! I wonder at you, Johnnie."

"And so do I," cried dame Page, very much scandalized. "To think of your taking a liking for an outlandish man like that. Did any anyone ever hear such folly? I am surprised at you, John. No, no; when Audrey marries, it must be some good honest man, who has learned his catechism, who will live in her own place, and let her be buried in her own churchyard along side of those as have gone before her. What does the good woman in the Bible say? 'I dwell amongst my own people.' Audrey will, I hope, take pattern by her."

Audrey did not answer; her imagination

“ Well, and I should like to know if I am not a bit of a judge? Haven’t I been school-mistress of Charliewood anytime these thirty years. Audrey, there is nothing prettier in Dr. Watts, or even in the ‘Speaker,’ than those little poems he has written. I like them better than my favourite—

‘ The rose had been washed,  
Just washed in a shower ; ’

but you must see them.”

Audrey expressed her eager desire to do so ; and then Johnnie urged on his grandmother the necessity of giving their guest some supper, and sending her home, as the curfew had tolled. Dame Page hastened at once to spread her small store upon the little table, and the trio partook together of a merry and social meal.

Audrey fell asleep that night with a lighter heart than she had had since her return ; John’s old, sincere friendship, and the home-charm attached to the little schoolhouse, did much to

console her for the lack of Helen's presence, and for the music and splendour of Crowhurst. Our country girl's head had been a little turned ; but the true heart would soon set it right again.

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had taken a capricious flight, even as the dame spoke, to the snow-capped mountains of the Tyrol. It was recalled by the sudden sound of the curfew, which was rung every evening in Charliewood; and the bell-voice, speaking thus at the instant, startled her.

“No, surely no,” she said, half dreamingly; “all would be strange and cold there. It is very sad to be a stranger in a strange land, Johnnie. And yet what are we but strangers upon earth? Oh! dear John, speak to me; tell *me* something now; for such a singular sadness is creeping over me.”

And she drew her seat closer to the sofa.

“There is but little news to tell you of our village, Audrey,” he said, at once complying with her request; “all things have gone on much as of old; except that old Mr. Livings has retired from business, and sold his shop and house to a young man who comes from London, and who is, they tell me, a great dandy.”

“Poor old Livings! I remember we used to

call him 'Romeo's apothecary.' Is he gone away, or will he live in the village still."

"He will live a few miles off, I believe; no house here is large enough for him he says."

"And yet small space should accomodate that fleshless body, surely. But so it is! I wonder, Johnnie, if you will ever become too big for this dear cottage?"

"You silly girl."

"Many a true word spoken in jest," said dame Page, drawing herself up; "if all Johnnie writes were printed in a book, I don't know what might come of it."

"Nor I, truly, granny," said the youth laughing.

"But, Johnnie, have you really been writing? Oh do let me see what you have done?"

"Some day you shall, Audrey; but it is only nonsense. I was dull whilst you were gone, and wrote to amuse myself; and my dear old mother, of course, thinks my scribbling wonderful."

so young a man could be safely trusted with the mystery of jars and gallipots.

However if they distrusted his skill in dispensing medicines, they were quite willing to allow him the superiority over his predecessor in personal appearance. Instead of the gaunt, ungainly, shabbily-dressed man who formerly entered the pew belonging to the chemist's house, there bustled into it, a small, neat, lively youth clad in the extreme of second-rate dandyism. He was as pretty as a wax doll. His cheeks were as pink as China roses, his flaxen hair curled close to a very round small head; his hands were small and white as a lady's and adorned with a very glittering ring. He presented such a fresh, clean and neat appearance, that it was quite a pleasure to look on him, and when he drew out his white handkerchief and waved it gracefully about his face, an odour of jessamine was straightway diffused in his immediate neighbourhood, that as Giles Higg, the ploughman said, "made him feel quite summerish."

It was quite remarkable the sensation that this individual created in the breasts of the rural congregation; and greatly to be feared that their reverend pastor's sermon against worldliness entered many deaf ears that Sunday, so busy were the eyes of the fairer portion of his audience.

"I'm sure," said Goody Brown, as she hobbled out of the churchyard that day, "I'm sure I shall never dare go and ask that fine gentlemen for two penn'orth of palm oil, for my old man's rheumatis'—as I used 'pothecary Livings."

"Well he do look dreadful grand that's true," was the reply of her companion, "but I dare say he's all the cleverer. No doubt, since he be so fine, a deal of money ha' been spent on his learning. I can't say though that I shall like him so well as Mr. Livings."

Opinions, however, differed in this matter as in all others.

Mrs. Dabney was quite charmed with the appearance of the new arrival, "he was," she



## CHAPTER XI.

THE new chemist and druggist of Charliewood announced his permanent residence in the place, by his appearance at church on the next Sunday. Our readers are not to imagine that the village possessed such a shop of drugs and perfumes as is to be found even in small country towns, it was but a little low house, with a small bow window in which old Livings had made a comfortable independance ; but in that little old fashioned countrified place, it was thought a great deal of ; the children would pause as they passed it after dusk, to gaze in wonder and admiration at the bright red, blue, and yellow bottles, that

flamed forth enlivening the dark row of houses ; and their fathers and mothers had as great a reverence for and admiration of the learned gentleman who presided behind the rainbow like lustre, and who could read all the hard mysterious words that figured on the jars, bottles, drawers and vases within. In fact Mr. Livings was almost as much looked up to as the doctor ; for he had a way of talking very learnedly on illnesses of all kinds, and used such difficult sounding words that nobody could doubt but he knew all about them—moreover he had been once heard to say “ that he was acquainted with the whole pharmacopia,” and as the villagers could not the least divine what “ pharmacopia ” meant they give him credit for an almost fabulous extent of knowledge. This worthy had however resigned the glories of the red and blue bottles to another, and his successor, who was quite a young man, did not attract so much veneration. “ To be sure,” the gossips said, “ they could not expect a second Mr. Livings.” and it was shrewdly doubted whether

said, “so *very* genteel—” And she never allowed Jonathan an hour’s peace till he had made acquaintance with the stranger.

Now Mr. Alton’s eyes had not been idle either in church, and to do his taste justice they had lingered longest on the prettiest woman in it. This was of course our Audrey, for we can without partiality, and in strict justice, assure our readers that she was by far the fairest of the village sisterhood, though Phœbe Ford, who sat in her pew, was not deficient in good looks. He soon discovered her relationship to the sexton, and in consequence, cultivated Jonathan’s acquaintance with great assiduity. He came several times to the cottage, prescribed for the sexton’s cough, begged Mrs. Dabney’s acceptance of a box of fruit lozenges on the making of which he greatly prided himself, and was very attentive to Audrey, calling her always “Miss,” and discoursing to her of the fashions.

Christmas was now approaching, that happy season of home comfort and grateful joy. Pre-

parations were already making for the adornment of the church, and for the distribution of the Squire's and Rector's winter bounty to the poor, and Audrey was sent by her godmother to help trim the new bonnets for the girls' school and to make packages of the tea and sugar for the good woman. Mrs. M'Coy had not seen the girl since her return from Crowhurst, except once at church, for she had herself been away from home ; and she was pleased with the improvement in Audrey's manner. She asked her about Miss Beaumont, whom she had known during Helen's former residence in England, and listened with much interest to her godchild's account of the heiress. And talking over her conversation with Audrey, to the Rector that evening she said, with her habitual candour.

“ After all, I believe you were right about Audrey's education. She has been exposed to a great trial by the over-kindness and injudicious petting of Miss Beaumont, and she has come quite scatheless out of it. She is as humble, as

modest, and as contented with her station as ever ; and so gratefully fond of her young patroness, that I am charmed with her."

"Ay, Anna, because the foundation of all Audrey knows is solid religious principle. Her mind has been opened, exercised and developed ; she has been taught what self-discipline is, and can rule her own faculties tolerably well."

"I trust she may bear trouble as well as she does praise and favor," said the lady, "and I dread it less for her. I have always *so* feared lest your teaching should have made her vain and conceited."

"With your wise sponsor training, that was a less likely evil than it appeared, my Anna. Audrey owes you much gratitude for the pains you have taken with her, and your faithful discharge of your trust."

Helen did not forget her little attendant to Christmas. Some game was despatched by her order to the sexton's cottage, and a small parcel

of books directed, in her own hand, to Audrey, whose rapture at the assurance that her beloved Miss Beaumont still thought of her, was as great as the delight which the gift itself afforded. Mrs. Hardy wrote to her niece, an account of how matters were going on at the Manor; and Mrs. Dabney—after keeping the contents of her letter secret, till she had, as she thought, teased Audrey intolerably—gradually dropped out bits of news at intervals, by which means the girl learned that a very great lord had wished to marry Miss Beaumont, but that the young lady would not have him, and he was gone away in despair; that Mr. Findelkind had been ill, and Sir Philip and his daughter had both been greatly distressed at it; but that he was better again now. All of which interesting intelligence Audrey, as usual, communicated to Johnnie; and he, putting them together, and gathering conclusions from his own inward experience, came to the opinion that poor “Prince Findelkind,” as he called him, had fallen in love with Miss Beau-

mont, and that his illness proceeded from jealousy of the great lord, and despair. Audrey laughed at this fancy as the height of absurdity.

“Dear Johnnie,” she said, “she is so much above him! Why you might as well fall in love with the moon; you can’t think, unless you had lived at Crowhurst, what a great distance there is between poor Basil and Miss Beaumont.”

“Ay, but I can, Audrey, and yet think the same. Has not our Shakespere taught you that love heeds not the difference of rank. Do you remember those beautiful lines—

‘Religious in mine error, I adore  
The sun that looks upon his worshipper,  
And borrows of him no more.’”

“Yes! I recollect; but I assure you, now-a-days, such love would be absolute madness. Miss Beaumont would *never* think of him.”

“And love is generally folly, and often madness, Audrey,” he said sorrowfully; his thoughts turning on his own vain affection for her, who was as far removed from him, he believed, as Helen Beaumont from the wandering musician.



“Dear Johnnie! how can you tell that?” she said, laughingly, “one would think, to hear you talk, that you were an old, experienced, forsaken lover.”

He smiled painfully.

“Audrey,” he said, “my experience of most things mortal is fated to be only a borrowed one. I get *my* love-lore, as I do most of my small knowledge, from my only teachers—books.”

“And very wise they make you, my dear boy;” she replied affectionately, “but in this instance you are mistaken—Findelkind *could* not be so foolish as to love my Miss Beaumont.”

John Page, however, persisted in his romantic fancy. There was yet another, who, in like manner, misinterpreted Findelkind’s ill-timed fever; and in this latter case, the error was a dangerous, well-nigh a fatal one.

## CHAPTER XII.

It had been the sexton's custom in Kate's lifetime, to give a Christmas party, on the Eve of the Nativity, and nothing merrier could be imagined than these little gatherings had been. Young and old had joined in all kinds of games—blind man's buff, cross questions, and forfeits. A bounteous supper had smoked on the board, and Jonathan had always sung his song, a ballad of some twenty stanzas in length, and Mrs. Ford hers, and the other guests had laughed *ad libitum*. That evening repaid the whole year's expectation of it in which the younger members of the group were wont to indulge, and had been quite a period to date pleasantly from, amongst

the villagers. Last year the observance had ceased, for neither Jonathan nor his niece could have borne such a reminder of their lost Kate—the merry little woman who had given such spirit to their winter mirth—but this Christmas, the sexton purposed to resume his old custom, and, accordingly, Mrs. Ford and Phœbe, the dame and her grandson, and all the old revellers, were invited to the cottage. The new Mrs. Dabney added *her* list of intimates, and extended the invitation to Mr. Alton, who was daily gaining ground in her good opinion. But the feast was to be conducted under very different auspices to those of the former hostess; Mrs. Dabney could not think of superintending the cooking of a hot supper, therefore it was decided that the game must be eaten cold; half the usual number of mince pies were to be made, and they of very shrunken proportions; and Mrs. Dabney positively objected to ale and spirits and water, as “vulgar and low,” and substituted, therefore, a rather acid home-made wine. Audrey’s heart

misgave her as to the merriment of the coming evening under this close supervision, but she did her best to make the room look as it did of old, decking it with boughs of holly and mistletoe, and wreathing the antique lattice with freshly-gathered ivy. Alas! even in this effort at calling back the semblance of past days, she was to be disappointed. When she descended from making her rustic toilette, a few minutes before the hour of tea, she found the room denuded of its natural and graceful ornaments, and her aunt, seated very uprightly, in all the glory of a tight and scanty silk dress, and a small prim cap, close to the dullest and neatest of swept hearths, while not a thing in the room was out of place, or gave the least sign of habitation. All was regular, stiff, chill, and uncomfortable.

“Oh! where is my holly,” cried the girl, in dismay, “and my beautiful ivy?”

“In the scullery, to be sure,” was the reply, “the ivy made the place look quite littery and untidy, and the holly gave the room the air of a

trim kitchen. Besides, I don't approve of such customs, I look on them as popish."

And Mrs. Dabney screwed her tight lips, still tighter together.

"Oh, Aunt! I am so sorry! it did look so very pretty."

"That's a matter of opinion, Audrey; and I suppose my taste must be the best, seeing the education that I've had. When I was at school, I attended several parties that my governess gave to the parents in the holidays, and most genteel they were. Miss Dumbledore had been to Boulong for *her* education, and we had things quite in the French style; we sat all in a circle in the drawing-room, which was never used except then, and had tea and biscuits and thin bread and butter handed round to us, and then we played and sang and conversed a little, and at ten there were sandwiches and biscuits and *o-suckrey* handee round—*o-suckrey* is sugar and water, Audrey. By-the-bye, we might have a little to-night."

“ Dear me aunt ! nobody would drink it ! ”

Mrs. Dabney sighed as deeply as her dress permitted.

“ Ah ! ” she said, “ what it is to be in a lower class of society than one was brought up to ! I’m quite out of my caste among the *canal*, as Miss Dumbledore used to say, but we will have things as *cum il fo* as we can.”

Audrey was in despair when she heard her aunt’s French thus brought into requisition ; it was always a sign of her becoming more than usually disagreeable ; so she rose, and walking to the lattice, pretended to be eagerly looking for the arrival of their guests. They came at last ; now, Mrs. Ford’s happy face smiled on her from behind the clustering of the porch ; now, the sound of the garden chair was heard, in which Farmer Morgan’s son was good-naturedly drawing John Page, and Audrey hastened to the door, to help the dame and the young man transfer the cripple from the chair to their old sofa. Many arrivals followed ; last of all, Mr.

Alton, very pink, very perfumed, and tugging on a new pair of white gloves, made his appearance. Jonathan received his guests with his usual solemn welcome; Mrs. Dabney with condescending politeness; Audrey with the warm smiles that gave her a place in every heart.

There is nothing so difficult as reviving by-gone mirth. When the shadow of the past does rise, it is generally only as a spectre, to scare or grieve us. We cannot conjure back merriment once fled. Above all, it is impossible to one so little gifted with heart-magic as was Mrs. Dabney, and, in truth, she did not try—she sacrificed rather to her idol “the genteel,” than to the genial spirit of the season; and, in compliance with her notions of it, she set her face against blind-man’s buff, as coarse and vulgar, forfeits as decidedly improper, and drawing her guests round the fire, entertained them with long stories of her relations in “great families,” and Miss Dumbledore’s gentility; or talked with Mr. Alton of the sights and gaieties of London.



Farmer Morgan, who found the evening duller than he could well bear, at last proposed that somebody should give the company a song ; and the hostess acting on the hint, forthwith proceeded to her old piano, and, to the infinite torture of Audrey, and the great edification of her visitors, performed, to unintelligible words, the air of “ *Celui qui sut toucher mon cœur ;* ” a reminiscence of the renowned Miss Dumbledore’s establishment.

“ Dear Audrey,” whispered John Page, during this interval of noise, “ your home is indeed grown desolate ! and your poor uncle, *he*, too, is changed ; his hearty spirit appears curbed and shackled.”

“ Ah, Johnnie,” she replied, in the same tone, “ one does not think, till experience teaches it, how miserable little discomforts make one ; now, what a blessing a warm heart is.”

Young Page wished he could have offered a home with him, and have told her how warmly one heart, at least, still loved her ; but the vain

wish ended only in a sigh. Mrs. Dabney's song met with the applause which it is deemed courteous to bestow on "Amphytrion avec qui l'on dine," Farmer Morgan alone was candid enough to acknowledge "that he *did* like English songs best; not that he meant to say but the one they had just heard was very fine, and he was obliged to Mrs. Dabney for it; but he hated the French and all belonging to them:" he begged leave to ask Audrey to tip them a stave of "Chevy Chase," or "Rule Britannia."

The girl laughingly assured him that she should leave both his favourites to himself and her uncle to perform, as they were not her songs; but that she would sing him one he had always liked to hear, and she began an old English ballad, in tones and with an expression that charmed all her hearers save her aunt, and which was followed by hearty and rather vociferous plaudits from the rustics; some of whom paid her musical power the homage of their tears. The hostess felt the difference of this approval

from the faint praise awarded to her own exertions, and greatly annoyed (for her indulged jealousy of Audrey was beginning to inflict continual torment on her), she rose from her seat and, pretending to have something to attend to, which required her own presence, she left the room and retreated to the kitchen, to indulge unobserved the angry envy which she found it difficult to conceal.

Whilst there, “chewing the cud” of mortified vanity, and endeavouring to console herself by the thought that, after all, these people were too ignorant to understand her or her songs, and that “*Celui qui sut toucher mon cœur*” had always been highly admired by Miss Dumbledore and the young ladies, she was startled from her reverie by a knock at the back door. On obeying the summons, a very strange figure presented itself on the threshold; it was a man clothed in several floating garments of bright colours, which looked as if composed of the bunting used in making flags; he wore a huge turban, with a

cock's feather in it, on his head, and grasped in one hand a very crooked scimitar. His face was concealed by huge whiskers and a long black beard. This apparition, thrown strongly out by the heavy back ground of the dark December night, *was* a little terrific, and Mrs. Dabney, after staring at it in mute astonishment for a minute, uttered a shrill little scream, which did not, however, reach the ears of the guests or of her husband, being drowned in Farmer Morgan's vociferation of "Rule Britannia," in which he was at that moment loudly seconded by the united voices of the company.

"Lor, Mrs. Dabney, don't be frightened; its only I," said a familiar voice; "Jem Sumner, I is,—a playing the Turkish Knight with the Christmas boys."

"And what do you want here," asked the sexton's wife angrily; "we are not going to give anything to you, I can tell you."

"Well, then, it'll be the first time that Sexton Dabney didn't have us all in," exclaimed

puzzled to decipher; the purport of which was that the writer loved her! Her! a married woman! the wife of Jonathan Dabney. She gasped for breath, and then re-read it in a low murmur, as if to assure herself, by the evidence of her ears as well as of her eyes, that such was the case; making a running commendation to herself as she perused it.

“ My amiable Friend !”

(Dear me, very genteel that!) “ I have a secret to confide to you, which I trust your own heart may have already revealed. (La! no, I never thought of such a thing!) You will guess it, when I add that I have been miserable ever since we parted. Crowhurst has lost all its beauty, all its gladness, with you. I love you, dearest, entirely and for ever; and yet, knowing your pledged promise, I dare not ask you to go with me to the dear land, I almost hope you love for my sake.

“ Apart from you—here, or in my native

Tyrol—I cannot be happy; but I may not selfishly urge on you a suit your duty to M. Dabney will forbid. If, however, you would give me only hope, that when this good Monsieur Dabney shall be no more, you will become my wife, I should be content.” (Well, I never heard tell of such a thing! and it’s quite foreign English too!) “Be good enough to let me have a speedy reply to this letter. Tell me, sweetest, that I may hope”—(Oh! good, gracious me)—“or, at least, give me an assurance that you are not displeased with me; that you pity

“Your all devoted,

“FINDELKIND.”

Mrs. Dabney paused quite overpowered by surprise, gratified vanity and alarm. The conscience of the English wife was shocked at this strange love, and the hint touching her husband’s death; but the vanity of the woman was deeply gratified by the devotion of such a man as the Tyrolese. It was decidedly the first love letter

the mummer—the old Christmas play of “St. George and the Dragon” was still enacted at Charliewood. “We always acts here after we’ve a’been to the parson’s, and I come to say that we should be a little latish to-night (cause Mister M’Coy’s got a party, and can’t have us yet,) unless Master Dabney liked us to act at once.”

Mrs. Dabney’s disrelish for giving anything to the mummers was a little shaken by this intimation of Jonathan’s habits, and of their admission at the Rectory. What the clergyman patronised *must* be genteel—therefore she answered more civilly, that she would speak to Mr. Dabney about it, and was retreating, when the Turkish Knight, suddenly recollecting himself, drew a letter from his pocket and presented it to her.

“I had a’most forgot,” he said; “but here’s a letter for you, mum, that a man, who is at the George, asked me to give you. He come from Crowhurst, he says, and was ordered to give that letter into Miss’ Dabney’s own hand, and not to



nobody else ; but he's been thrown from his horse by the way, being a little in liquor ; and though he aint hurt, he's so wet and muddy he aint fit to come on. He's sorry for it, as well as 'cause the letter's got a bit dirty, as he had it in his hand when he fell."

The missive was, in fact, a mass of mud, which rendered the direction illegible. Believing that it came from her aunt, Mrs. Dabney laid it aside for a minute, and hastened to ask her husband about the mummers. Jonathan signified his desire that they should be admitted, and his wife, not daring yet to oppose him in all his old habits and fancies, returned to tell Jem Sumner that he and his comrades might appear at once. The Knight, with many thanks, departed to summon his companions, and Mrs. Dabney, snuffed her candle and opened her letter, intending to read it before their return. Amazement ! what did she behold—not the usual gossiping missive from her kinswoman, but a letter written in a small, clear foreign hand, which she was a little

his small arts of captivation, to win the affections of the sexton's niece. He assured her, that though he had been to most of the public places in London, he had never seen any lady as pretty as herself. He then recommended Gowland's Lotion for her complexion, and some infallible powder for increasing the whiteness of her teeth, and begged her acceptance of anything his stock of perfumery contained. Audrey laughed off his flattery with an easy pleasantry, which he interpreted in his own favour, and when the evening closed, he already looked on her as the future Mrs. Alton.

The snow lay so deep upon the ground by the time the little party prepared to disperse, that it was thought impossible to wheel John Page's chair homewards, and the sexton offered to let him sleep on the sofa, which he asserted "made a very good bed at a pinch," adding, "and he will be all the nearer for church to-morrow, dame Page." The schoolmistress gladly acceded to

this proposal, fearing exposure to the cold for her darling, and as she kissed and wished Audrey good night, whispered an injunction to her "to be careful of poor Johnnie."

The warm-hearted girl did not require the reminder; she endeavoured by every means to make the temporary bed-room comfortable, and John, delighted at sleeping under the same roof with her, and seeing her in the early morning, was disposed to be pleased with every thing. A like amiability appeared to have suddenly fallen on Mrs. Dabney; she looked, to be sure, brimful of importance and simpered in a way that amused Johnnie; but for Audrey's sake, he rejoiced at the change, and he said in a low voice to the girl, as he bade her good night, (making allusion to the first story he had ever told her) "Our old friend of the well has certainly re-appeared. Don't you see the diamonds and pearls dropping from Mrs. Dabney's lips, instead of the toads and frogs?"

too she had ever received, and in spite of the reproaches of her conscience, she could not help feeling pleased with it. She was perusing it for the fourth time, when the mummers appeared, and she very reluctantly put it in her pocket, in order to usher them into the parlour. She was too flurried and excited to pay the least attention to the performance that followed, and her manner and look would probably have been a cause of wonder amongst the guests, had they not been occupied in laughing at, and with, St. George and his company. Her agitation did not indeed wholly escape observation; John Page's quick eye discerned the changed expression, the bewildered and pleased look on the brow of his hostess, and he remarked it to Audrey in a whisper. The girl smiled and put her fingers on her rosy lip.

"Hush," she said, "she hears as quickly as the princess in the fairy tale, who could perceive the grass growing by its sound. Be thankful in silence, dear Johnnie."

Supper followed the Christmas mummary, and though Mrs. Dabney tried hard for composure, it was manifest to all, that a change had come over her, and that a pleasant one; for she smiled incessantly, suffered Jonathan to sing his favorite song without interruption, and when young Morgan, who had peeped from the window, observed that a snow storm had come on, and that the ground was already a sheet of white flakes, she only replied "delightful," and asked farmer Morgan if he had ever seen an avalanche. The good man stared, but replied in the negative, observing that he had never heard of any such thing in their parts, and he could not say that he knew what it was; whereupon Mrs. Dabney explained and grew quite warm in praise of snow, to the farmer's amazement, who declared he should not like to be out in such a drift as she described, and he was more thankful than ever that he was an Englishman.

All this while another scene in a love drama was being performed. Mr. Alton was using all

“ May the spell long continue,” she replied ; “ we are deeply obliged to the fairy or magician who has cast it over her. Good night.”

The snow-storm, which had prevented John’s return to his family, continued the greater part of Christmas Day, and in the afternoon Mrs. Dabney volunteered to remain at home with the poor invalid, to the great amazement of Audrey ; for hitherto the cripple had been an object of dislike and scorn to the sexton’s wife. Page himself would far rather have spent the time of afternoon service alone, than with such a companion ; but he was obliged to appear grateful for an attention, his utmost efforts could not prevent being paid him. Mrs. Dabney did not, however, prove as he had feared she would, a tediously talkative companion bent on being amusing ; on the contrary, soon after Audrey left them to go to church, she offered John the family Bible and a prayer book, and observing that she dared say he would like best to read for himself, left him and (taking Jonathan’s inkstand with her)

retired to her bedroom. She continued there till near the time of the sexton's return, and descended at length, looking very cold and very mysterious.

Her amiability, nevertheless, continued, and when the man usually employed to draw John to morning service, came to take the young man home, Mrs. Dabney, with a most good-natured smile, proposed that as it was finer weather now, Audrey should go with him and chat an hour or so with dame Page ; an indulgence which she rarely accorded to her niece, and which was consequently doubly welcome. The girl eagerly acceded to it. Whilst she was putting on her shawl again, her aunt drew her aside, and said in a whisper ;

“ Audrey, you can just step on to the post, and slip this letter in for me ; but don't let your uncle see it, or he may be jealous.”

More perplexed than ever Audrey received the missive ; and Mrs. Dabney continued,

“ Was your uncle ever jealous of his first wife, child ?”



“Jealous of aunt Kitty! oh, no, who could think of such a thing?”

“Why to be sure she *was* a very different person from his second; some few years older, eh! Audrey? I think there *is* a difference.”

“A very, very great one,” said Audrey emphatically; she was growing angry at this disparaging mention of her beloved Aunt, “no one could think of comparing you, Mrs. Dabney, with my dear aunt Kitty.”

“Well, I suppose not,” with an affected giggle, “therefore don’t let the good man see my letter. Ah! he little thinks what I have sacrificed for his sake.”

And with a sentimental sigh, Mrs. Dabney turned away. Audrey began to doubt her aunt’s perfect sanity, but she obeyed her injunctions and slipped the letter into her pocket. On gaining dame Page’s she told John of her mission and promising to be back very quickly, ran

nimbly on to the post office, thinking all the way of her new aunt's strange conduct. When she drew the letter from her pocket, however, the superscription happened to be upwards, and her eye half unconsciously fell on it; for a moment, she doubted the evidence of her own senses—it was directed to Mr. Findelkind! What could it mean? For an instant the colour mounted to her brow, as something like a suspicion that he might have been corresponding with her aunt on her, (Audrey's) account rushed across her mind—But then why should Mrs. Dabney conceal it from her, and wherefore should she fear Jonathan's jealousy of her writing to the Tyrolese? She could not escape from this bewilderment, therefore she posted the letter and ran back to tell Johnnie of her aunt's strange secret correspondence.

Page listened with infinite glee.

“Hurrah!” he cried, as she ceased, “long live Prince Findelkind! did I not tell you last

night that there was magic in it? glamour and sorcery of the first Tyrolese sort, I assure you?"

"Don't be so silly, John!" she looked quite cross, "but try and guess what really *has* happened."

"Your aunt has rivalled Miss Beaumont."

"Oh folly! the one fancy is as silly as the other."

"Nay, then, not being a fairy prince myself, though not much unlike a fairy changeling—I can't tell."

"I am sure" said Audrey, with some vehemence, "I am sure that Basil Findelkind loves neither Miss Beaumont nor my aunt."

John Page's smile fled and he fixed his eyes earnestly on Audrey's face; she blushed and turned away. A dawning jealousy of which she was herself ashamed, and which she tried to think absurd, was revealing to her the hitherto unsuspected fact, that Findelkind occupied as much of her thoughts as Miss Beaumont, with whom he had hitherto been associated in them, and that

she could ill bear the faintest notion of his loving another.

She was absent and dull all the remainder of the evening, and her young companion became infected with her gloom.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

BASIL's doubts of Audrey had been removed accidentally by Miss Beaumont. He was one day turning over the leaves of a music book, which contained some of the glees the young girl had been accustomed to sing with them, when the lady expressed her regret that Audrey did not live near enough to come sometimes and join in them.

“It must have been a sad change for her to go back to a cottage, and, I suspect, to have to endure the ill-humour of that disagreeable dress-maker; though Audrey never told me so, nor ever named her aunt to me.”

How those few aimless words, “Audrey never told me so, nor ever named her aunt,” thrilled on the ear of Findelkind. Here was plain, unintentional exculpation of the poor girl from the charge made against her; the conclusion drawn from it was instant—

“The woman belied Audrey on one point; doubtless, the charge of ill-temper was equally false.”

How willingly he acquitted her! He had suffered much at the thought of her unworthiness; he had felt as he did when first the novelty of a new mode of life wore off, and that pining for home inherent in mountaineers stole over him; and he had been ill more from excess of feeling, and a sense of desolation in a strange land, than from any physical cause. He determined at once to declare his affection to Audrey; rather as an atonement for the injury he had done her, in believing a report to her disadvantage, than with any hope of speedily marrying; for when, in her artless chatting with him, she

had talked of her beloved and lost aunt Kitty, she had told him also of her promise to the dying woman, never to leave her uncle whilst she could be of any use or comfort to him, and he knew well she would hold that pledge sacred. Moreover, he was as yet too poor to keep a wife ; but he looked forward to the prospect of making a golden harvest in London during the approaching season, and if Audrey would but give him the slightest hope, he felt that he should have a spur to exertion that must needs insure him an entire success.

He, therefore, wrote the letter which—as we have seen—fell by a whimsical accident into Mrs. Dabney's hands instead of Audrey's, and fearful of misdirecting it, or of its not reaching his lady-love, he eschewed the safe and rational mode of sending it by post, and hired a man from the adjoining village to carry it to the sexton's house. It was an awkward letter to write, even had it been couched in his own language ; and by his imperfect knowledge of English, the difficulty



and awkwardness were doubled ; indeed (though we allow our hero's epistle was both a little ludicrous and not a little obscure), it was a wonderful composition for one who had been so short a time acquainted with our confessedly difficult English.

Our readers may imagine how anxiously he awaited Audrey's answer, and what a good augury he drew from the letter delivered to him the morning after Christmas-day ; at least, there had been no hesitation in the young girl's mind ; his offer was answered by return of post. He had scarcely patience to finish his hurried breakfast, ere he retired to his own room with his prize, and tore it eagerly open. It ran thus :—

“ Charliewood.

“ Monsieur, and dear Sir,

“ I take up my pen to say that I received your epistel last night, quite safe, though muddy, by the hands of Jem Sumner, the man who acted the Turkish Night. I beg to say that I am

much astonished that you should have thought that I should have thought that you had a pang-shant for me ; I am sure no such a idear ever came into my head, and I can say on ma foiw, if required, that I never gave you resin to think I was such a sort of a young woman. However, I am not so enragée with you as I should have been if you had been an Englishman, for as Britania rules the waves, so she rules little Cupid, and don't allow him to get folks into the scrapes he does on the continent, of which a lady who lived at Bolong told me a great deal, quite harro-fying to my principals. Therefore I will not riproche you a propos of not being quite cum il foo, but beg to say that if Mr. Dabney was to be dead and buried to-morrow, I couldn't think to marry a person who is a Papish, after being so connected with the Church ; nor could I abide to live on a Avalanche or any foreign parts, being a true born English woman. And I don't think as anythink you could say would make me change my mind, though to be sure their's no knowing

(as I am but a week young woman). I shan't mention the subject to Mr. Dabney nor to my aunt, and I beg to remain,

“ Chere Monsieur Findelkind,

“ Votre—truly,

“ A. DABNEY.

“ P.S. I hope you are well, as this leaves me at present.”

Basil, as he finished perusing this precious epistle, stood for a moment like one stunned by some sudden calamity. He was utterly bewildered. This from *his* Audrey! This jumble of bad English, and ludicrous French—this heartless, foolish insensibility to the pain she must have known she would inflict. It was far less the absurdity, however, than the cruelty of the letter that pained him; his love would have been blind to the ignorance of the beloved peasant girl, but it could not brook or excuse her want of feeling.

It was almost incredible. She who had been

so kind—so sympathising—so gentle—thus to reject, with haughty insolence, the offer of an honest heart; not a word of soothing or kindness—no softening down the bitterness of such a rejection—it was utterly unwomanly, and he crushed the letter angrily in his hand.

“The coquette!” he thought, “she *must* have seen I loved her! Women have a rare instinct for perceiving their own power. She could not have been astonished at such an avowal. Oh, Audrey! how different from the simple hearted girl I thought you, does this letter show. The woman Hardy was right; you are deceitful beyond suspicion, almost beyond belief! And what does this conclusion mean?” he had opened and was half perusing the letter now; “I don’t think as anythink you could say would make me change my mind, though, to be sure, their’s no knowing, as I am but a week woman.” “Is this an invitation to try my further power of persuasion? If it be, she is mistaken; I loved not such a woman as the writer of this letter; I *will*

not be the dupe of a coquette. One kind word, one regret—and even rejected, I had loved her still.”

And Basil pressed his hand upon his eyes, as if he would fain drive back the tears that filled them. He would have thrown the letter into the fire, beside which he stood ; but an averseness to destroy anything that came from her hand (for with him love could neither be born nor die with the facility of the mushroom) pleaded against it ; though with the sophistry of pride, he sought to persuade himself that he retained it in his possession, only in order that the occasional perusal of it might complete the cure of his fancy.

With a trembling hand, therefore, he consigned Mrs. Dabney's production to his desk ; then pacing the room with hurried and agitated steps he endeavoured to recover his self-possession, and to persuade himself that it was better for him that Audrey had refused him—being what she was. But though he framed the thought, his heart utterly refused to assent to it, and spite

of that hateful letter, the image of the young girl a very incarnation of candour, simplicity, good sense and kindly feeling—rose rebukingly before his mind's eye, even as it had, when he found how falsely she had been accused of injuring Mrs. Dabney. His painful reverie was interrupted by a summons to attend Sir Philip in the library. He obeyed almost mechanically, and stood before his patron with a face so full of misery, so pale and stern, that the good baronet was startled.

“Why, Findelkind,” he said kindly, “what is the matter? Are you ill? No? Then what is it? Something surely must cause that lugubrious face.”

“Sir Philip,” replied the young man, (he always conversed with his patron in German) “you are too good and too generous not to pardon me, when I own that I am growing anxious to labour for my own bread; that I begin to feel pained at my long and entire dependence on your benevolent hospitality.”

This avowal was perfectly true, though Audrey's supposed letter had rendered him doubly desirous of changing the scene of his occupation.

"I commend your independent spirit," said Sir Philip, frankly, "it does you honour; but you must never consider yourself under an obligation to me. I owe you more for my child's life, than my whole fortune could repay."

"Nay, the having saved so sweet a lady was recompense enough for the peril," exclaimed Basil, "I must ever consider you, Sir Philip, as my noble and most generous benefactor."

"Well," said the baronet, "it was to speak of your future plans I sent for you. Miss Beaumont and I were talking them over at breakfast and we have come to the conclusion, that it is time for you to make your *début* in London. It must be by a concert; we will engage a good room, the assistance of such musical talent as we may find in town, and the patronage of as many of the nobility as possible. You will thus have secured some repute, and made a little money



tected by an honoured and distinguished gentleman and patronized by all the lords and ladies who chanced to be in town. His concerts were perfect triumphs. He was invited to sing at the few parties going on, and even left London for a few days, to charm some ducal circle of hunters and fair dames with the musical joy of the Chamois hunter, or the song of the Alpine shepherd. Flattery from the lips of the noblest and fairest fell softly on his ear; smiles and gifts were showered on him; it appeared as if his voice were a sufficient spell to bring the pomp and pleasure of the whole world to his feet. Nor were the "golden opinions" he won, only metaphorical; his actual profits were great, and one year promised to produce what would be a little fortune in the Tyrol.

But amidst all these triumphs, Basil was sad. He was alone in those crowds; his vanity was gratified, but his heart still felt desolate. Sometimes, he would exult at the idea that the ignorant country girl did not know *whom* she had

rejected ; that if the fame of his success reached her ear, she might repent of her decision ; but oftener he regretted that she was not a sharer in his good fortune, that he could not read in her eyes a double joy at his renown. Moreover, his position in his patron's house was slightly altered ; his character as a public singer appeared to have interposed a gulf between himself and Miss Beaumont. She had been to him (ever since they first met in the Tyrol, when she owed him her life,) as a dear and honoured sister, rather than as one so widely separated from him by social position ; and he had partly forgotten that great difference, in her kindness and condescension. As soon, however, as they entered into the whirl of fashionable life, Helen retreated, quite naturally, and almost imperceptibly at first, within the fortress of her rank ; and Basil was for her, to all appearances, no more than any other public singer. She never saw him now, except in public, and though *then* ever kind, and warm in her praises of his performance, it was with a

before the commencement of what is called the season. We shall go to town with you, both that you may still have a home in my house, and that we may forward your interests and introduce you favourably to the public notice.

Findelkind warmly expressed his thanks, and the baronet, telling him that they should start for London the day after the morrow, dismissed him.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

EVERYBODY knows how a novelty is run after in London, especially at a time when the great city is in the very dregs and lees of dulness ; such happened to be the case at the moment of Findelkind's appearance, and he was, therefore, hailed not only as a musical wonder, but (still better in the estimation of the gentle public) as a relief from *ennui* and a topic for conversation. He came, not a poor unknown foreigner, destined to make his way with slow and painful steps, up the height of popular favour—a more difficult ascent than his native Alberg in mid-winter—but the inmate of a noble mansion, pro-

entreaties, sent at once for a physician. The doctor found the young lady in a much more delicate state of health than her father had thought her ; her pulse indicated low fever. He visited her a few times, and prescribed a change of air, and perfect quiet. Sir Philip instantly resolved to go into the country. When he communicated this intention to Findelkind, he informed him, also, that the Beaumont town residence should still be his home till the season was over, when he could either return, and rest for a short time at Crowhurst, or go back to his own land, should his gains prove sufficient for his future wishes.

The Tyrolese expressed a hope that he might soon revisit his native mountains, but craved permission from his patron, to bid farewell to him and to Miss Beaumont, ere he quitted for ever, the shores of England. The permission was kindly and courteously granted.

## CHAPTER XV.

MRS. DABNEY was not given to keep secrets, though she delighted in mysteries; and *such* a secret as the love of the great singer (of whose success Jonathan read such wonders in the ale-house newspaper,) was not to be retained by mortal woman, in her opinion. Did not the “great people,” of whom she was such a zealous admirer, delight in honouring Herr Findelkind? Was not his likeness, holding an open song in its hand, and smiling—as he never did smile—to be seen in the music shops? She had been charmed at receiving, as a gift from her aunt, one of these illustrations of the singer and his

certain proud, cold condescension, which wounded him ; for he loved her sincerely—even as brother might a sister. The service he had done her, and her past frank friendliness had greatly endeared her to his loving and gentle heart.

He felt anxious, also, about her. The dissipation into which she was drawn, appeared to alter her health ; she looked older by some years, than when they arrived in town ; and her queenly beauty wore, at times, an air of impatient and magnificent scorn, that pained him, for he detected a latent bitterness in it. Had the young lady, gifted as she was, found it impossible to command a love she would fain have won—even as he had ? A “fellow feeling,” if it does not always make us “kind,” (and there *are* cases in which it has the reverse effect !) makes us at least wondrous quick sighted ; Basil felt convinced of the truth of his supposition, and gave Helen, consequently, all the generous pity of his simple heart. Often, when standing, surrounded by a crowd of approving and compli-



mentary hearers, in some stately drawing-room, his eyes would wander from his fair flatterers to the spot where Miss Beaumont sate, and dwell on her with anxious tenderness. Once or twice, her quick glance detected this earnest gaze, and she looked disconcerted and angry.

Sir Philip, himself, was struck with his daughter's sudden passion for gaiety, (*he* was still unchanged, and talked to Basil as kindly and familiarly as of old,) and noticed it, one day, to his young *protégé*. "I fear," he said, "Helen is over-exerting herself; she looks pale and languid, but I cannot persuade her to stay at home a little, now and then. It is strange! she never used to care for balls, nor, in fact, for any amusement but the opera, and now she is a constant and untiring reveller. But noble as she is, I suppose even her womanly vanity is flattered at being so indisputably the *belle* of the season."

One evening, however, Miss Beaumont fainted at a dinner party, and Sir Philip brought her home greatly alarmed, and, in spite of her earnest

music ; and declared the likeness “ wonderful,” though Audrey angrily denied any resemblance in it to the Tyrolese. Moreover—and it was a crowning honour in the opinion of the village dressmaker—was not a neck-tie called the Fin-delkind tie ? And all this glory and renown had been laid at *her* feet and rejected, in perspective. No wonder that when the good sexton, thinking to please her by news of somebody with whom she was acquainted, brought the paper home, and in his solemn monotonous voice drawled out the account of “ Hur Fiddlekin’s ” concert, at the Hanover Square Rooms, being attended by a large and delighted assemblage, &c. &c. Mrs. Dabney could not look simply interested, as she might be expected to be, in the success of an acquaintance ; but sighed and wiped her eyes, and (if the applause was declared to be *very* tremendous) would even go into slight hysterics, to the immense danger of her strings. The sexton was greatly impressed by

these demonstrations ; never suspecting, however, their meaning ; but quoting them as proofs of what “ a tender hearted soul his wife was—a deal more so than poor Kitty had been—he couldn’t mind that he’d ever seen *her* cry so easy.” For Jonathan was proud of his second-hand acquaintance with Findelkind, and rejoiced in talking of his “ wife’s friend ;” it gave him a sort of importance with the villagers in general, though some only laughed at his interest in the stranger, and all were puzzled at Mrs. Dabney’s mysterious looks and smiles and sighs whenever the Tyrolese was mentioned. Audrey’s perplexity was, however, greater than theirs, for she saw and heard more to wake her wonder, and the recollection of the letter to Findelkind which she had herself posted, gave point to many otherwise aimless suspicions. But she was not destined to remain long in suspense ; as we have said, Mrs. Dabney *could* not, under the circumstances, retain the secret. She whispered the affair to Mrs. Ford, her ancient rival—to Mrs.

Morgan—to Dame Page, and gradually, one by one, to every female gossip in the place—to each in strict confidence, of course,—showing the letter, and explaining how it had shocked her propriety, and what a sharp reply she had sent the foreigner. With the exception, perhaps, of Dame Page, the confidants were all *very* jealous, and *very* vexed that she, who always gave herself “such airs,” should have this new cause of triumph, and they relieved their mortification by exclaiming at Findelkind’s impertinence, and saying that they should have liked to see him being so rude to them; *they* would not have taken it so quietly. “Poor dear Mr. Dabney, to be looking out for his death in that way.” And village prejudice and jealousy ran high against the innocent Basil.

Dame Page, who never had a concealment from her beloved boy, related the fact to John, and he—in his turn—with many a sly jest at his own power of divination—repeated it to Audrey; for Mrs. Dabney’s strict sense of “the proper,”

prevented her from explaining the meaning of her looks and dark sayings touching Findelkind to her niece, whom she always styled "the child." The poor girl heard it with astonishment and pain. If Dame Page, who was a shrewd woman, and could read well, had not seen the letter, Audrey could not have believed it; nay, but for the fact that the missive had been such a distinct offer to Jonathan's future widow, not his wife, she would still have cherished the hope that there was some mistake, and that the epistle was meant for herself. But there appeared no room to doubt, and she could but grieve and wonder.

Since her dear aunt's death, trouble and vexation had gathered thickly and quickly around her. First, the greatest of griefs, death; then the new, harsh wife, and the lost comfort of home; her love for a stranger—one of another land and of another faith, and now, the folly and unworthiness of that beloved one. Thus it is in life; the small cloud gathers, in size not bigger than a man's hand, but spreads with won-

derful swiftness over the hitherto calm sky, till the storm breaks in its fierceness, and thenceforward it is but a wrestling and enduring the pitiless tempest of the world, till the calm of death ends all. Audrey was yet to have another trial, and it was well for her, perhaps, that, happening at this time, it partially diverted her mind from thoughts of Basil. Her dear friend and pastor, Mr. M'Coy, had been presented with a valuable living, and was about to leave Charliewood. Very unwillingly had he determined on abandoning his beloved flock, nor would mere mercenary motives have induced him to resign his charge; but his wife's family resided close to the offered preferment, and he could not, kindly or justly, refuse a position which would enable her to cheer the old age of her parents with her presence. The departure of the M'Coys was a sad loss for Audrey; her godmother had ever been ready to listen to all her little troubles, and counsel her in all her difficulties, and (though the girl know it not), the awe which the second Mrs.



Dabney entertained of the parson's wife, shielded her from much of the shrewishness which would otherwise have fallen on her.

The whole village mourned the loss of their pastor, as they might have done that of a father, and he bore to his far off new parish, the blessings and the prayers of many a grateful heart. His successor was not one likely to rival him in the affections of his old parishioners. Mr. Benbow was a bachelor of sixty, who had passed the greater part of his life within the precincts of a university, and was by nature and habit ill qualified for the office of parish priest. He could far better have served the cause of the church with his pen than as her minister amongst the poor. He knew nothing of human nature, though he was mighty in the knowledge of Greek verbs, acquainted with every antiquarian volume of research conceivable; therefore pastoral duties were alike disagreeable and awkward to him. The rustics appeared almost creatures of an unknown species; and his heart was not



warm enough to open to him, the hitherto sealed volume of man's character, as nature alone formed it. He was not an unamiable man ; on the contrary he was kind-hearted and good-natured, but his human sympathies had never been called into play and were consequently dull, slow, and imperfect. Of course he had not the frank, hearty, genial manner, which made M'Coy at home at every fireside ; he was absent, shy, and thoughtful ; his very language was tinged with Greek and Latin idioms, which rendered him unintelligible to the villagers both in the pulpit and out of it. They admired his learning, thought his sermons very fine, and there, all interest in their new pastor ended. It was indeed a sad day for Charliewood when its good angel, the gentle, kindly clergyman was taken from it.

Audrey had stolen out into the churchyard one afternoon some few days after the M'Coys departure, to indulge her sorrow uncarped at by Mrs. Dabney, and was sitting in sad, and almost tearful reverie by that beloved grave on which her

unconscious childhood had joyously sported, when she was startled by a hand pressing her shoulder and a voice uttering her name. She started and turning round exclaimed joyfully,

“Miss Beaumont !”

“Ay ’tis I Audrey.—But what’s the matter? You were in such a melancholy and deplorable trance of thought that I walked up to you and stood for a minute by your side without your hearing or perceiving me.”

“I have had a great grief to bear, madam,” said the girl, her lip quivering as she spoke, “two of my best and kindest friends are gone away for ever.”

“How ! dead ?”

“No, no, thank heaven, not that ; and Audrey explained her meaning, not however without a little fear, that her beloved Miss Beaumont would say something satirical of her cause for sorrow. She was mistaken, Helen quietly expressed her pity, and there was so marked a change in her voice and manner, that Audrey, gazing at her with some surprise, perceived that the brilliant

lady was much changed. Her colour had faded, her eyes appeared deeper set and had a graver and more thrilling expression, a shadow had fallen over her whole countenance, that dimmed and softened it. With rustic simplicity, and more affectionate anxiety, the girl at once asked, "If Miss Beaumont had been ill?"

"Yes, Audrey, but don't look so distressed, I am well now. A London season soon deprives a face of its roses; it is only you happy peasants who can preserve the bloom of youth unfaded—your pleasures are more joy giving. This hour of quiet thought in a churchyard is an enjoyment for you, is it not?"

"A great one, when I am happy, madam, But," she hesitated, then went on timidly, "we peasants have no pleasures that great ladies may not also command. Miss Beaumont's park is a pleasanter place to think in than a churchyard."

"A good rebuke for an ungrateful neglect of one's blessings," said Helen, with something of her old tone, "but there is a certain skeleton

called *ennui* that haunts most of one's luxuries, with which spectre you are not acquainted, but to which you owe my visit. How is your old comrade, the cripple?"

"As well as he generally is, madam."

"And as patient and cheerful as you used to describe him? Come you shall take me to see him. I have already made acquaintance with your uncle, (who is a model sexton,) and escaped the hospitalities of your aunt, by seeking you myself, in spite of her entreaties to be allowed to send for you, and now I wish to extend my acquaintance in Charliewood."

Audrey was most ready to obey, and gladly led her lady visitor from the churchyard across the village, and down the green lane to dame Page's cottage. She was delighted that John should see her beautiful Miss Beaumont. Helen pleased her also by admiring the prettiness of the village, and the beauty of the schoolmistress's flowers. Her heart quite beating at the idea of how Johnnie would be surprised, and what he would

say and think, Audrey knocked lightly at the half-open door. A sweet voice bade them enter ; but Helen paused for a moment and gazed with a pleased eye on the little scene before her. The neat room, with its array of little “forms” or benches, its picture-decked walls, its hugh nose-gay on the round deal table, beside which sat that pattern of clean, neat, gentle old dames, bending with spectacled eyes over her work, and the crippled form—joined to a face of such exceeding beauty—lying on the poor, plain couch. It was a very rare thing for a tear drop to dim Miss Beaumont’s eyes ; but just at that minute they glistened with a pearly moisture ; she was touched by the patience and meek happiness of that lowly pair, even as she had been at times by the reading or hearing of some great or heroic action. A scene of poverty and misery, or of weeping repining would have moved her much less. She followed Audrey into the room softly, and returned the greeting of the dame and her grandson with an involuntary respect, very dif-

ferent from her usual haughty condescension. John's cheek flushed a little as Audrey announced "Miss Beaumont," in a delighted, fluttering voice, and he exchanged one glance with her to tell her that he understood her pleasure and was glad too, and then regaining his composure, talked to Helen with his habitual calm self-possession. He was reading when they entered, and opening the volume he had put down, she perceived that it was "Twelfth Night." She began discussing its merits at once and quite easily, as if she and John had conversed many times before, and after smilingly talking of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew and Malvolio, she asked him, "if Olivia were a favorite of his?"

John answered enthusiastically in the affirmative. "She was," he said, "a noble lady; loving beyond example, as her grief for her dead brother showed; and brave-spirited to dare the anger of the duke and the blame of the world, and wed with only a poor gentleman."

"But to forget her dignity of station, her



high descent, her womanly modesty so utterly, as actually to woo one that did not love her ! ” exclaimed Helen.

“ Ah ! madam,” replied the cripple, defending Olivia as earnestly as if she had been a personal friend, “ she did not, she could not believe that the supposed page would be indifferent to her beauty, her goodness, her great condescension. She knew he *dared* not woo *her* ; it was generous, not unmaidenly of her for *his* sake to waive the dignity of her rank and sex. Believe me, I think it was a greater sacrifice for one so proud—distinctly described as proud, Miss Beaumont, than to die for her love.”

“ I think so too ! ” exclaimed Helen, as if involuntarily, then suddenly checking herself and blushing, she continued, “ You are a leveller my good youth. Such doctrines wont do for the nineteenth century. But what are these scattered papers ? Are you a writer, Page, as well as a reader of Shakspeare ? ”

“ Oh yes, madam,” said Audrey eagerly, “ he



writes beautiful verses. Johnnie let Miss Beaumont see those you wrote whilst I was at Crowhurst."

Colouring, and looking a little shy, John assented, in his heart, with great repugnance; but as he told Audrey afterwards, unwilling "to make a fuss about it." Dame Page produced a letter case which he opened, and presented Miss Beaumont with a roll of paper. She took it, and perused a number of fugitive pieces with great interest. When she had finished them, she sat thinking for a few minutes, holding them in her hand.

"Page," she said at length, "I am no great judge of these things, but they appear to me above the usual par of modern poetry; will you let me take them and show them to papa, he is a very accomplished scholar and a writer himself. I should like him to see them."

John, colouring with natural pleasure, replied "that, of course, it should be as Miss Beaumont pleased."

"Then I please to take possession of them

forthwith," was the reply, and as she spoke, she rose to go.

"Madam," said John, laying his hand on the volume of Shakspeare, and hesitating.

"Well, what do you wish? If you dislike my taking the verses, say so."

"Nay, 'tis not that, madam; but you said just now, I was a leveller, and I did not like you to go away with that notion. *Indeed*, Miss Beaumont, I am not. You must let me add that Olivia ascertained *before* she offered her hand to Viola, that the supposed Cesario was a gentleman by birth, and, therefore, her equal in all except great fortunes. It was only wealth she set at nought in her choice."

A blush of the deepest crimson flushed Miss Beaumont's cheek as the youth spoke, and she averted her eyes for an instant; then rallying herself, she answered with much more of her habitual haughtiness than she had yet shown, "You think shrewdly and well. I am glad you are a proof that one of your class can be educated

without becoming a democrat. Good day, Page ; good morning, dame."

And holding John's papers in her hand, Miss Beaumont left the cottage.

"Audrey," she said, as they retraced their steps towards the sexton's, where Miss Beaumont's carriage waited, "that poor young man is desperately in love with you."

"Oh, no, madam ! He loves me as his sister, nothing more. Johnnie in love !"

And she laughed softly at the idea.

"It is unhappy for him, for, of course, you cannot return his affection. Have you a lover amongst the villagers, Audrey ?"

Helen did not ask the question impertinently and carelessly ; but kindly, and in a tone of interest."

"Ah ! yes, madam, I wish I had not."

"And why ?"

"Because it causes me so much trouble. Our chemist has made me an offer—a good hearted, kind young man, though I don't love him

as the girl bade her farewell; "if these people teaze you too much, come to me."

And nodding goodnaturedly to her, Miss Beaumont pronounced the word "Home," and the carriage drove off.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

HELEN Beaumont had spoken truly, when she said that she did good to no one "that she knew," for her indiscriminate charity sometimes had a directly evil effect, and her life, without aim or purpose beyond the low one of gaining skill in a favourite accomplishment, was a very Midsummer-day's idleness, full only of dreams and fancies. Setting aside the power which her wealth, and the influence of her beauty and talent gave her to do good—a power neither used nor appreciated—she was utterly ignorant that there was a little world within herself that needed active and vigilant government. She

—and my aunt and uncle do teaze me so to marry him. Since Mrs. M'Coy went away, my aunt has grown quite cross to me about him."

"Poor child! So even *you* have your crosses, and worldliness is as rife in a village as in a court. This is disappointing. I came expecting to find an Arcadia in this same Charliewood of yours, and behold I meet with a hopeless lover, and a damsel teazed to marry. Life in the fields is much the same as life in the palace."

"I suppose it is," said Audrey, thoughtfully, "Mr. M'Coy used to say that the only way to understand our life rightly, and not to be disappointed in it, was to look on it as a period of toil and exertion, in which we are called only to do our Lord's business, and bear our burden's patiently, the *rest* being hereafter."

"Very wise doctrine, for you. But what would he have said to the butterflies of the earth who have no sort of business, but to sport in the sun?"

Audrey coloured a little as she said, "He

did not think there was any such, madam. He said, the great and rich people had more to do than the poor; because they were the servants to whom God had given many talents; and, to be sure, he and Mrs. M'Coy *did* show that rich and wise people, who have no need to work, and seem to have nothing to do, may be busier than those who toil for daily bread."

"I can't think how they managed then," said Helen; "I don't think I do the least good in the world to any one but papa, and I only *amuse* him. Heigho! I wish I could amuse myself."

Our little Audrey was too modest and too timid to read a wholesome lecture to the spoiled heiress, who had appeared to address this speech chiefly to herself, and not to her rustic companion. She made therefore no reply, and proceeded in silence, broken only by occasional questions from Miss Beaumont, to the spot where the carriage stood.

"Good bye, Audrey," said the young lady,



the unhappy Miss Beaumont had decided on sacrificing all—even her loving and only parent—for his sake, and received him with smiles of the sweetest kindness.

She had persuaded Sir Philip to invite the popular singer to join them at their meals, for she could no longer endure the thought that he should sit at the same table with Mrs. Hardy ; and her manner, always gracious and kind, assumed a marked difference to him, before the servants. Even if Sir Philip had remarked this peculiarity he would not have suspected its cause, but would have ascribed to his Helen's generous care for the feelings of one, who was *now* their guest ; but he did not. We are all astonishingly unobservant of what passes immediately beneath our eyes, unless our suspicion or jealousy be roused ; and how could the noble-hearted gentleman dream, even for a moment, that his proud daughter loved the peasant of the Tyrol ? He would as soon have thought of her becoming guilty of some mean falsehood, or base theft. The servants

were the first to perceive and comprehend Miss Beaumont's attentions to Findelkind ; and could she have heard the comments in the servants' hall, she would have been sufficiently punished for her folly. But there was no one to whisper a possibility that would have made her shrink back in disgust ; no one to warn her, no one to restrain, Alas ! for the motherless Helen !

She took daily music lessons of Basil ; she often detained him after they were over to discuss the merits of different composers, or to chat about the Tyrol. He was pleased and grateful for her notice, but he never for an instant forgot his position. The frank manliness of his manner was ever tempered by the most perfect respect. Thus passed the first few weeks of his stay at Crowhurst. A change then came over his fair hostess. She grew irritable and fretful ; sometimes when he entered the room, she received him with haughty coldness, at others with a timid, deprecating air, as if sorry for her former peevishness ; he marvelled at these changes of her mood ;

had no idea of controuling her own thoughts or practising self denial. The “keeping her heart with diligence,” had not been one of the branches of her otherwise universal education. She had never, for her own sake and for the sake of duty, opposed a single inclination or checked an idle thought. Nature had endowed her with a sweet temper, and a quick intellect; and there was something noble and candid about her that promised greatness of character; but all her good gifts (save that of mere intellect) were left wild as she inherited them. One of her great faults, cherished too by circumstances, was her idleness; she could not bear mental labour of any kind. She read to be sure, a great deal; but her reading was partly for entertainment—a book that required any exercise of the mind was at once thrown aside.

The old nursery hymn tells us that—

“Satan finds some mischief still,  
For idle hands to do.”

With much greater truth might the same be

said of *idle heads*, especially when the said heads are as capable of work, as was Miss Beaumont's.

Who can say how much idleness, and the want of any fixed purpose or duty, had to do with the distressing fact that the proud Helen had bestowed her heart upon a low born peasant ; given it, too, unsought, and unhappily (for want of that blessed habit of self-controul, and moral government so often and sadly neglected), with such an entire surrender of her will to her affections, that even the strong prejudices of her rank and breeding, the innate modesty of womanhood—and the consideration she owed to her father and family quailed before her unbecoming love.

Pride, not principle, did indeed for a time struggle against it, and the conflict was so severe as to shake her health ; but pride is a poor defence and a feeble foe opposed to passion, and was finally worsted in the strife. When Findelkind returned to Crowhurst, to bid his patron farewell, previous to his departure for the Tyrol,

in his heart he regretted that she should have become so capricious, but he was too modest and good to guess at the true interpretation.

One day when they were talking of musical composition, Helen with a heightened colour and half averted face, placed in his hand a paper containing the following verses of Steele's :

From place to place, forlorn I go,  
With downcast eyes, a silent shade,  
Forbidden to declare my woe,  
To speak, till spoken to, afraid.

Me to the youth, who caused my grief,  
My too consenting looks betray,  
He loves, but gives me no relief—  
Why speaks he not who may ?

“ Will you,” she said, timidly, “ will you set these verses for me ?”

“ Certainly mademoiselle,” he replied, and he glanced rapidly over them.

“ Do you understand them, Herr Findelkind,” she added, in a tone so tremulous that Basil, turned round on the music stool and gazed wonderingly at her. Her eyes were downcast and her

cheeks covered with blushes. Completely puzzled, the Tyrolese re-perused the verses.

"I think I do," he said doubtingly, "they do not appear difficult; but my knowledge of English is still very imperfect—is there any hidden meaning or point I may not perceive in them?"

"Nay," the English has but one meaning," she faltered, "I leave you to find it out and set it truly," and rising she hurried from the room.

Findelkind, amazed and confused, remained gazing on the lines with silent bewilderment. What *could* she mean? The line "Why speaks he not that may," was underlined strongly; and then the stanza's themselves—so singular—so inferior, in poetic beauty, to most of the English poetry he had read—why had Miss Beaumont chosen them? Suddenly the whole sad truth rushed upon his mind, and his ingenuous countenance, crimsoned with shame for one, whom he had hitherto loved with such reverent affection; but he checked the thought of blame. *He*, at least, owed her much for the sacrifice of womanly

reserve and modesty she had made for his sake. He stifled the involuntary disgust that had risen in his mind; he strove to be grateful for her unsought affection, and but for one restraining motive he would have endeavoured to return it. That motive was the knowledge of the fearful blow such a choice would inflict upon her father—upon his dear and honoured patron.

Had she been completely and entirely at her own disposal, Findelkind would have risked all the chances of unhappiness which lay in a union so far beyond his station, and mastering his still latent love for the ungrateful Audrey, would have endeavoured to repay Miss Beaumont's by the devotion of his life; but the image of Sir Philip rose between them, and forbade the thought. Could he be so ungrateful to him who had been a father to him, as to plunge such a dagger in his heart? To rob him of his only child, to abase his pride, to usurp in Helen's right the wealth of his family? He shrunk in absolute horror from the thought. But what could he do? how escape



from this delicate and difficult position without wounding too deeply the heart thus offered to him, and without appearing ungrateful to Sir Philip?

Overwhelmed by the embarrassment in which he was placed, he was still sitting at the piano holding the paper in his hand, when the music-room door opened, and his patron stood before him. He rose at once confused and colouring deeply, and his self-possession was not restored by the look or words of the baronet. In fact Sir Philip, returning unexpectedly to the house from an intended long ride, and on his way to the room to speak with his daughter, had met Helen in an agony of tears in the corridor, and in answer to his amazed enquiries as to the cause of her grief, had received so confused and unintelligible an answer, that his suspicion was suddenly and painfully roused, and permitting her to break from him, he had hurried on to see if she had been alone or whether Basil had been witness also to her emotion; when he beheld Findelkind, also confused and embarrassed and holding what

appeared to be a billet in his hand, his astonishment and anger found vent in words.

“What is the meaning of all this, Herr Findelkind,” he said, “why are you here without Mrs. Hardy’s being present,” (the housekeeper was always called in to sit with Miss Beaumont during her lessons,) “and why is Miss Beaumont in tears?”

Findelkind replied, that he did not know that Miss Beaumont had been in tears; but he was a bad actor, and his confusion, and stammering reply only added to Sir Philip’s anger.

“There is some strange mystery,” he exclaimed passionately, “in all this; I must and will know the truth. Have you dared forget the respect you owe my daughter, and offended her by insulting professions of affection.”

“No, on the word of an honest man, Sir Philip!” replied Basil firmly, “I have never ventured to utter a syllable to Miss Beaumont that you would have disapproved; I have never

cherished a sentiment, with regard to her, that was unworthy of her and of myself."

"Then what mean her and your visible agitation and embarrassment?"

Findelkind, unable to answer, could only blush and be silent.

"Speak, I *will* know the truth," cried Beaumont vehemently.

"There is nothing to reveal," said Basil with an effort; "Miss Beaumont summoned me to give her a lesson, desired me to compose the music of a song for her, and left the room. On my word, Sir Philip, I knew not that she was in tears, I can tell you no more,"—still flushing a deeper and a deeper crimson—"on my honour."

Sir Philip Beaumont was staggered—he knew not what to think. There was a moment's pause—a flush mounted to the father's brow also.

"Findelkind," he said, "when I entered the room, you held a note in your hand; the paper,

the very folding, I recognised as Miss Beaumont's. What was it ? ”

“ Simply the words of the song the young lady wished me to set to music.”

“ Let me look at it.”

Basil hesitated for a second, and only a second ; to refuse showing it would be to acknowledge that it had a double meaning. He gave the song to his patron. Sir Philip perused it, suppressed a deep groan, crushed it in his hand, and left the room.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

SIR Philip proceeded straightway to his daughter's boudoir, and, on entering it, found Helen seated at the table, her face buried on her folded arms. She lifted her head as he entered, but her eyes sank beneath the stern anger she read on his noble brow. In perfect silence, he laid the unfortunate verses before her. She looked at them with an expression of wonder and agony; then uttered a sharp, bitter cry—

“He has betrayed me!”

“No, Helen,” said the voice of awful reproof beside her, “you have betrayed yourself—betrayed the modesty and dignity of your sex—your father's confidence, and the honour of your

name. Oh. child, child ! little did ever I think that you would smite me with such shame."

And Beaumont's dark, tender eyes swam in tears. In an agony of grief, Helen sank at his feet, and sobbed—

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me !"

"He raised her and re-seated her ; for some moments neither could articulate a word. At length, mastering his emotion by a powerful effort, Sir Philip, in stern and solemn accents, desired his daughter to tell him the whole truth.

"What," he said, "has passed between you and this young man ? Has he dared to accept the love those miserable verses offered him ?"

"Alas !" she sobbed, "surely not, since he has betrayed me to you."

"Helen," said Sir Philip, "he has not betrayed you ; nay, I believe he has tried rather to shelter you and himself,—the ungrateful villain !—by a base lie, backed by his plighted honour. *His* honour ! the low born rascal, he does not know what the word means. From *you*, I ask

the truth. You are a Beaumont, at least *you* will not lie to me. Speak, Helen ! tell me all. Has he dared love you ? ”

Crimsoning with shame, her proud head bent, the heiress replied to this adjuration, and in faltering accents, confessed all the truth. How she had long loved the Tyrolese peasant, and had struggled with her affections till she had been ill, and how she had that morning given him the verses her father had seen ; but that no word of love had ever passed between them. Very hurriedly, very incoherently was the avowal made, but Sir Philip knew that it was the whole, and the very truth. In a degree it relieved his mind ; at least Helen was not pledged by any rash vow. It was possible that he might still save her, and screen her dignity.

“ But what did you mean by exclaiming that Findelkind had betrayed you ? ” he asked, as she paused.

“ I saw the song in your hands—I thought



he had guessed from it what I felt for him, and had given it to you because . . . . .”

Sobs interrupted her words.

Sir Philip turned from her and paced the room for a few moments, in stern and sorrowful silence.

“Helen,” he said, pausing at length before her, “in honour I am bound to acquit Findelkind of falsehood. (Confound my folly for giving him a home though!) He has not, as your first exclamation led me to believe, deceived and lied to me, I owe him this justice; but he shall not rest another night beneath my roof.”

She clasped her hands, and looked imploringly in his face.

“Nay, in this I am firm. It is in your power,” his lip quivered as he spoke, “it is in your power to marry him, if you so will it. You are of age, your mother’s large fortune is at your own disposal; but, Helen, when you become the wife of a public singer, cease to think of me as

your father. All ties between us will be broken. It is for you to choose between me and Findel-kind."

Bitter and passionate reproaches would not have had half the power to awe Miss Beaumont, which those calmly spoken words possessed. They fell on her ear as a sentence of doom; and when she raised her looks to the noble countenance bending over her, and saw the depth of anguish expressed in those large dark eyes, that all her life long had watched over her so lovingly, passion fled before the holy tie by which she was bound to him, and with a stifled, agonised cry of "Father," she threw herself into his arms. He clasped her to his bosom.

"My child! You will not then desert me? You will not bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

"Oh, no, no! forgive me, forgive me."

He kissed her tenderly.

"My Helen, I do—nay, more; I thank you for the sacrifice you make for me. I was to

blame for bringing such a one as Basil into intimate fellowship with my daughter; but I thought my Helen no common woman;" she winced a little, and seeing it he added, "nor *is* she, since she can thus rule her affections."

"And Basil," she whispered; "You will not punish him for my fault, papa?"

"Assuredly not. I shall dismiss him with all honour; with all the respect due to an honest man."

She sighed profoundly. There was lingering uneasiness still in Sir Philip's mind.

"Helen," he said, "I scarcely need ask it; "but as a safeguard for yourself, pledge me your word that you will neither see nor speak to Fin-delkind again without my sanction."

She gave the required promise in a low, faltering voice.

"It is enough," he said, again embracing her; "now I will leave you, my brave daughter, and endeavour, as much as may be, to preserve your dignity in the eyes of this stranger."

He left the room, and Helen threw herself on a couch, exhausted by her recent emotion.

“Poor father,” she murmured, “you have asked my life, and I have given it. He could better bear my death, than what he deems—and and so, in truth, do I!—my degradation.”

Sir Philip hurried to Findelkind. It was an awkward task that lay before him; but he was aided in it by the tact and delicacy of the young foreigner.

Basil’s instant inquiries after Miss Beaumont, his assumed belief that some sudden illness had driven her from the music-room, greatly lightened the difficulty of the baronet’s position.

“Helen is far from well,” he replied; “indeed I have reason to be very anxious about her, and I came to you, Findelkind, to say, that, as her music lessons appear to be prejudicial to her, and she requires quiet and solitude, you had, perhaps, better leave Crowhurst for a few weeks, and take a trip about the country. You will

not, *I know*, feel hurt at this apparent inhospitality."

"I was about to make the same proposal, Sir Philip," said the young man, colouring slightly. "I have been idle too long already, and should be glad of your permission to depart (since my services are no longer required) as soon as may be."

"We will say to-morrow then, Basil; and, believe me, you take with you my esteem and best wishes."

And with kindly courtesy Sir Philip extended his hand. Basil grasped it warmly, and his eyes filled with tears.

"My kind, excellent patron," he said, "believe in my entire and devoted gratitude for all your past and present goodness. I shall leave England for the Tyrol in a few weeks now; my heart yearns for my fatherland."

Sir Philip understood the assurance those words were intended to convey, and in his heart thanked his young *protégé* for it.

“They are a noble, self-sacrificing pair,” he thought that evening, in the solitude of his library; “were the young fellow but the son of a gentle English family, he should have my daughter, though he were penniless. It is a great pity that he is but a wandering peasant.”

The following afternoon Basil left Crowhurst; he was to post across the country to the nearest town, where he had long promised to give a concert, and from thence, after fulfilling his musical engagement, he intended to proceed to London prior to his departure for the Tyrol. Sir Philip took an affectionate farewell of his *protégé*, and insisted on his acceptance of a well-lined pocket-book, as “a recompense for his instructions to Miss Beaumont;” which, though unwillingly, Basil gratified him by receiving, thus acknowledging himself as her music-master only.

Miss Beaumont kept her chamber on the unfeigned plea of severe indisposition. Findelkind felt too sure that it was real, and gave her his tenderest pity and regret. As the carriage flew

road it isn't a posting house ; and Charliewood's a mighty pretty village, if you should prefer taking a walk meanwhile."

Findelkind started at the name. Chance had then brought him to Audrey's dwelling place ! Cold as his suit had proved, he still loved her, and the thoughts of visiting the spots blessed by her daily presence, and of perhaps beholding her again, thrilled him with delight. He made up his mind at once ; he would remain there till the morrow, and give the remainder of the evening to exploring Audrey's birthplace. He signified this intention to the post boy ; ordered dinner, secured a bed at the Crown, and then went out to ramble in the village.

The pretty village spire, rising above the ancient elms, directed his steps to the church ; he sauntered thither, hoping at every turn to meet Audrey ; but an old feeble woman and a clownish boy were the only individuals that crossed his path. At length he stood before a cottage, which appeared to him the very one



Audrey had of old described as her home, and he paused at the wicket. Should he enter? Whilst he hesitated between reluctance and a wish to see the young girl, the door opened, and he instinctively drew back to the shelter of the high holly hedge. Perhaps Audrey was coming out. His heart beat with hope and apprehension; but a shrill voice raised high in conversation told him the next moment that the female who was walking down the little pathway was not his love. Involuntarily he caught her words.

“I am sure Mr. Alton, Audrey will be very sorry she was not at home. I will give her the flowers, and tell her what you say; or, perhaps, you’d like to step down to Mrs. Page’s to her?”

“No, thank you, ma’am,” replied a man’s voice; “I can’t say I like going there. I can’t abide that conceited cripple.”

Mrs. Dabney gave a shrill little laugh.

“What are you jealous of Johnnie?” she said “really that’s too good. Eh, eh! Oh, you lovers!”

through the park gates, and the young man took a farewell glance of the Crowhurst oaks, the whole affair appeared to him as a confused and wondrous dream, and he sank back with a sigh, and yielded to a vague reverie, in which the two forms of the beautiful heiress and his ungrateful little Audrey appeared rather like creatures of the imagination than actual realities.

He was rudely aroused from this reverie by a sudden shock, a concussion and two loud up-raised voices ; the next moment he was lying on the side of the post chaise, which found itself in the ditch ! By some awkwardness of his post-boy the carriage had come in contact with a huge waggon, laden with heavy timber, which the driver had not drawn sufficiently out of the way, and was at once overturned and much injured.

Our musician, thus forcibly recalled to everyday life, had some little trouble in extricating himself from his unpleasant position, and when he had succeeded in so doing he found the acci-

dent likely to be a very tiresome one. One of the horses was a good deal hurt, and the driver's face cut and bleeding.

The place, a cross-road, far from any human habitation; the postboy and Findelkind's united efforts could not raise the luggage-laden carriage from the miry abyss into which it had sunk; and the waggoners, brutally refusing assistance, had left them. Findelkind resolved, finally, that the postboy should take the uninjured beast and ride on to the nearest village for assistance, whilst he remained with the other and the carriage. Some time was, of course, thus consumed; and when at length the chaise was raised, by the aid of the villagers, it was found so much injured, that it could only be drawn at a slow pace to the village, where Basil found he must perforce remain till it had undergone repair.

“But your honour will find the Crown a comfortable Inn,” said the postboy, “for a country place, though being out of the direct

of the sexton's cottage. He bent his steps down a long solitary lane branching off from the main street of the village. The pathway, after a time, ascended and terminated at a lodge gate, beside which a gentleman had just dismounted from his horse. There was still light enough for Basil to recognise and greet this personage as a friend of Sir Philip Beaumont's—the "Squire," in fact, of Charliewood, and his salutation was cordially returned; for Mr. Melton loved music and liked the Tyrolese.

"But what brings you here, Herr Findel-kind," he asked, "at this strange hour, and alone? Have you left Crowhurst?"

"Yes, to fulfil a musical engagement;" and Basil then explained by what circumstance he had been turned from his direct route and detained at the village inn.

"I really can scarcely regret the accident, since you suffered no personal injury," said Mr. Melton; "for it will give me an opportunity of introducing you to my wife, whose health has

never permitted her to go and hear your unequalled voice. You must accompany me home.”

Basil accepted the invitation gladly—the dull inn parlour hanging threateningly behind him—and they proceeded towards the house. Mrs. Melton (the former champion and friend of poor Tom Dabney), a delicate and pleasing person, received the famed singer with kindly courtesy, and he spent a long evening at the manor, singing to the invalid, and chatting pleasantly with her and her husband till the church clock struck eleven. His host would have had him sleep at the house ; but he was anxious to start early in the morning, and, therefore, declined the proffered hospitality ; Mr. Melton, however, insisted on his accepting the escort for a servant to the inn.

“The lane is a lonely place,” he said, in answer to Basil’s refusal, “and though, I believe, the village people are an honest set, still a singular disappearance took place in it many years ago, and Mrs. Melton is always nervous about

Findelkind, who had been gradually retreating, here lost the sense though he still heard the sound of their voices ; but with an irrepressible desire to see Audrey's lover (for such it appeared the male speaker must be), he looked back ere he turned the angle of the road, and beheld the smart dapper form of the young chemist advancing jauntily down the lane. This then was his successful rival ! It must be owned the flattered musician's lip curled a little as he gazed ; but when Alton drew near enough for him to see the kind and gentle expression of his pretty features, Basil's momentary contempt yielded to a jealous conviction, that Audrey had just cause to prefer her countryman. With a sigh, the Tyrolese retraced his steps to the Inn, and did but small honour to the repast there awaiting him.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE is nothing, perhaps, more depressing to the spirits, than sitting in the dim twilight in a small inn parlour alone ; the absence of all signs of domestic occupation in such an apartment, gives a feeling of utter loneliness, which is banished, to be sure, by the presence of a cheerful fire ; but which in summer, when the bars wear only their sunshine attire of snowy shavings, becomes very saddening and solemn. Findelkind in his present mood could not support this solitude, and although night was gathering its gloom already over the village, he took his hat and again strolled forth ; but not this time in the direction



strangers traversing it, and would be exceedingly uneasy unless she had a speedy assurance that you had reached your inn safely. Nay, in compliance with her fears, *two* of the grooms will attend you, in order that no one may return alone by it at night.”

When Basil found himself outside the park gates, he was glad that Mrs. Melton had been thus considerate, for the profound darkness of a cloudy night would otherwise have made it difficult for him to retrace his way. One of the men however carried a lantern, and guided his steps by it. They were still on the brow of the acclivity on which the lane ended, when a sudden light blazed up on the right hand, illuminating the heavy sky with a fierce, sullen glare. The eyes of Findelkind and the servants were instantly attracted towards it, and one of the grooms exclaimed,

“It is a fire! and to be sure it must be at dame Page’s—her’s is the only house down yonder.”

“Is it far from the village street?” asked Basil.

“Yes, sir—half a mile or more.”

“Have they fire engines in Charliewood?”

“No sir, not as I know of.”

“Hasten on and learn, or at least desire them to bring help,” said Basil, “whilst I and your comrade endeavour to reach the house by the shortest road. Can we go across the meadows straight to it?” he added.

“Yes, sir, if you don’t mind wet feet.”

“Let us on, then directly!” he exclaimed; and you, to the man he had desired to hasten to the village, “bring help as soon as possible.”

The groom ran on; and guided by his companion Basil leaped the hedge, and was soon traversing the fields with the fleet steps of a mountaineer. Their course was fatally guided by the flames before them, which rose higher and higher into the dusky night. Breathless and panting the groom stood at length beside the burning cottage, but owing to his alpine habits, Basil was not exhausted by his speed. The fire

had been seen in the village, but as yet no one had reached the spot. A window was open near the roof, and as they neared the cottage, a faint cry issued from it. Basil was up the walnut tree in an instant, and bending it by a powerful exertion of strength towards the casement, leaped in with wonderful agility. As he alighted on the floor, he stumbled over the prostrate body of dame Page, who finding her efforts to remove Johnnie unsuccessful—a neighbour was wont to carry him nightly to his chamber—had been vainly crying for help, and had sunk exhausted by fear and despair, insensible on the floor—he raised her in his arms, opened the door and bore her through threatening flames, which burnt his hair and clothes, and, through clouds of smoke, down the tottering stairs, depositing her finally outside the dwelling; the fresh night breeze and the motion, restored the poor woman's senses, she endeavoured to rise, and screamed wildly—

“My boy, my son!”

“Ay,” said Basil, “I must seek him,” and

he was about to return to the burning house, when the groom caught hold of his arms.

“For god’s sake don’t sir,” he said earnestly, “the stairs have fallen in; and you could never escape with that cripple in your arms.”

“I will try,” was the simple rejoinder, and putting the man firmly on one side, Basil re-entered the dwelling. The groom, who had in fact been endeavouring to find a way for himself, was right; the old wooden stairs fell beneath the power of the flames at the moment Basil had issued from the cottage, and the interior of the dwelling now presented the appearance of a huge, glowing furnace. The Tryolese turned back.

“I must try the ascent of the tree again,” he said, “be ready to receive the lad from me as you best may, my good fellow.”

And once more with the lightness and agility of a squirrel, the lithe form of the mountaineer swayed from the bough into the open casement. He shouted aloud, and a voice from a back bedroom replied to his call. Following it, he beheld

our poor John Page lying on a couch, the curtains of which were already in flames. To seize him in his strong arms, and bear him to the front chamber, leaping across the fiery gulf formed by the fallen staircase, was the work of a very brief interval of time; but it sufficed to scathe the brave deliverer severely with the flames, and when he dropped his heavy burthen from the window, on a feather bed, which the villagers (who had now reached the spot) spread below, he uttered a groan of pain, and scarcely knew how he managed to throw himself out after the delivered cripple, or what followed his dangerous exit.

“He has swooned!” said the crowd to a young maiden, who pressed eagerly forward after having spoken with tearful joy to John Page, “the good gentleman is much hurt.”

She bent down over him, looked on his face, blackened with smoke, and uttered a low cry.

“Uncle, uncle!” she exclaimed, “it is Mr. Findelkind—Oh! bring water, stand back that he may get air.”

And with trembling hands and tearful eyes, Audrey used all her simple skill to restore poor Basil; she was aided by Mr. Alton, who had some medical knowledge, and who at once proposed the removal of the sufferer to the village. He would even have offered the Tyrolese the shelter of his own roof, but the landlord of the Crown, (also one of the crowd, which in fact consisted of nearly all the village,) claimed his guest, and a rustic bier belonging to the workhouse being hastily fetched, the young man was placed on it, and carried off; not, however, before he had seen Audrey's sweet face bending over him, a sight which would have reconciled him to his sufferings if he had not recognised in her assistant in tending on him, the pink and white countenance of her lover. Whilst some of the group were thus assisting the brave young musician, others had been showing neighbourly kindness to Dame Page and her boy, by endeavouring to extinguish the fire; but their utmost exertions were vain. The cottage was an old wooden dwelling, dried by time; it burned like a pile of



shavings, and the small and slow supply of water which their buckets afforded (for there were no fire engines in Charliewood) scarcely sufficed to dim the brightness of the raging element. The poor trembling old schoolmistress stood watching with tearful eyes, the destruction of her sole property—of her beloved and comfortable little home; murmuring at the same time a low prayer of thankfulness that her chief blessing, her poor boy, had been spared to her. John lay at her feet, waiting the return of the bier to be also conveyed to a shelter; and Audrey kneeling beside him, strove to cover him from the damp night air, by wrapping her shawl closely round him, whispering all the time words of comfort.

They were placed at some little distance from the burning dwelling, but as the roof fell in with a crash, all started, and dame Page uttered a loud cry—

“My boy, my boy!” she said, “we are homeless beggars.”

“Nay, nay, dame,” said Jonathan’s pompous voice beside her, “not so bad as that. We’ll get

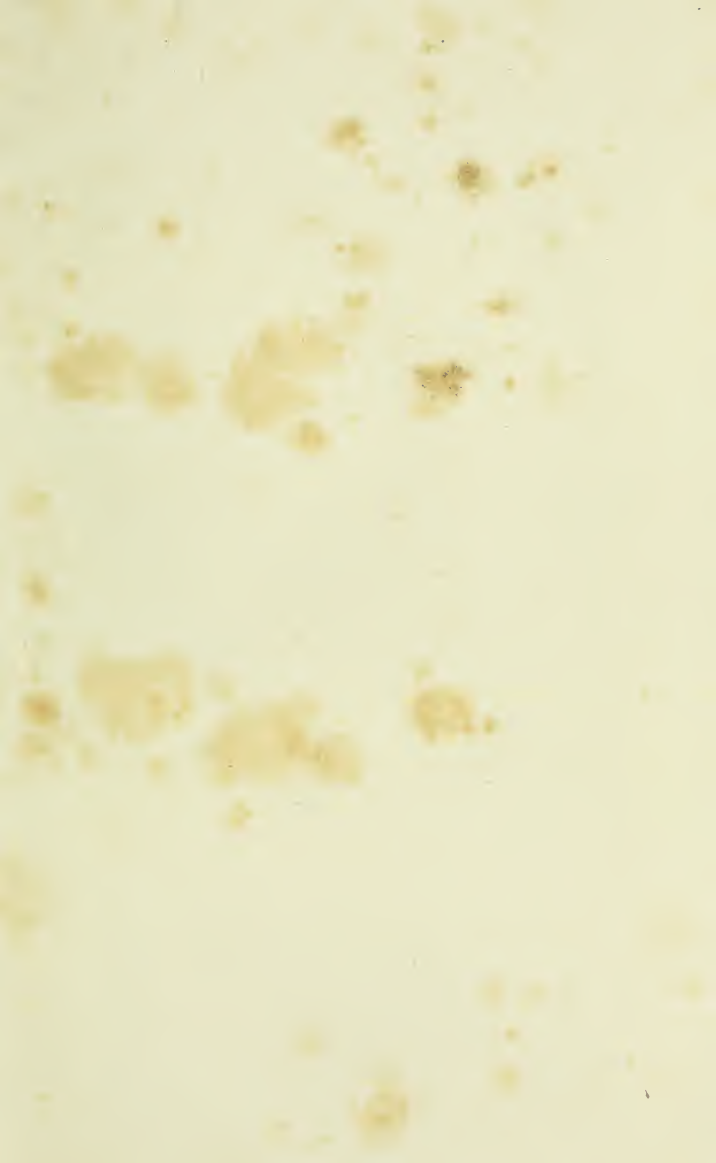


another house for you soon, and meantime you you shall both come home with me. Look you now, here come the men back with the bier, let John be placed on it, and we'll soon have you under shelter. It's no use grieving, dame. It's the Lord's doing, and we must submit. Come out of the conflagration."

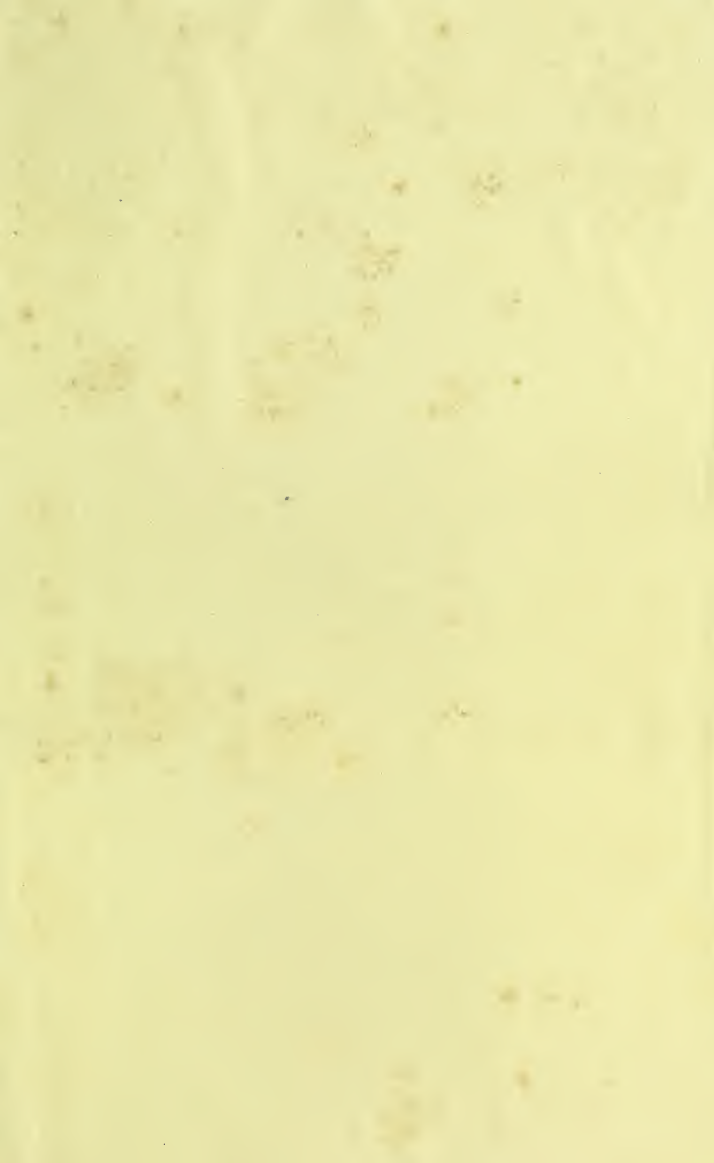
And he assisted in lifting John upon the bier, and divested himself of his own coat to cover the poor cripple. Audrey could have hugged her uncle for his kindness, but she refrained from this public demonstration of her feelings, and lending her arm to dame Page, supported her towards the sexton's cottage, endeavouring to console her in the gentlest manner; but the poor old woman was bewildered and terrified, and only answered her by repeated ejaculations of—

"Oh dear! oh dear."

END OF VOL. I.







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